STOKELY CARMICHAEL: FROM FREEDOM NOW TO BLACK POWER

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CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS

COFO	Congress of Federated Organizations
CORE	Congress of Racial Equality
KKK	Klu Klux Klan
LCFO	Lowndes County Freedom Organization
MFDP	Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party
MIA	Montgomery Improvement Association
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NAG	Nonviolent Action Group
SCLC	Southern Christian Leadership Council
SNCC	Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee

ABSTRACT

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This research was designed to examine the transformation of Stokely Carmichael from a reformist in the Civil Rights Movement to a militant in the Black Power Movement due to experiences which he encountered while an organizer in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). The three factors which Stokely Carmichael, as well as some of his corroborators in SNCC, spoke most of were soured relationships with white liberals, the ineffectiveness of moral appeals to the government and white southerners, and the significance of black nationalist politics. These factors contributed to Carmichael's shift in ideology and caused many members of SNCC to follow him.

The research suggests that Stokely Carmichael and his comrades in SNCC made the transformation to Black Power due to their disappointment with the results of civil rights tactics. However, due mostly to repression from the government, they were never able to move past ideological explanations to actually implementing a program. The African-American community made the transformation in much the same way that

Carmichael and SNCC did. Self-pride and a self-definition became prevalent topics of discussion in the African-American community. However, the psychological gains did not cross over into their economic and political lives. There was a definite interest in black nationalist politics in the African-American community. However, again, any efforts to mobilize the African-American community into a powerful force working for its own self-interest were squashed by the FBI who sought to eliminate any potential black militant leaders.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A Historical Review of The Civil Rights Movement

Stokely Carmichael, who is also known as Kwame Ture, is most notable in history for his use of the slogan "black power" as a political cry to a large African-American audience in 1966. The purpose of this research is to examine the experiences of Carmichael as an organizer in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (particularly in the initial stage of his Black Power position), and to further clarify how and what issues contributed to Carmichael making the controversial shift from civil rights integrationist to Black Power militant. A civil rights integrationist can be defined as one who uses moral appeals and non-violent action to secure full citizenship rights for African-Americans.[1] However, the Black Power militant is basically a nationalist who theorizes that African-Americans should unite in order to gain the structural capacity to define, defend, and develop their own interests.[2]

In 1966, when Carmichael initially articulated Black Power, he sought to gain power for the African-American community by building black-controlled institutions. He did not intend to make appeals or necessarily to advocate nonviolence. He intended that African-Americans would somehow participate in the established system on their own terms and by whatever means necessary. Carmichael was considered a militant because he advocated nationalism as a means for African-Americans to gain power. The ideas that Carmichael articulated in his discussion of Black Power included the following: community control, independent politics and self-defense. These were not

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[1] Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 14.

[2] Maulana Karenga, *Introduction to Black Studies* (United States: Sankore Press, 1989), 247-248.

revolutionary ideas. In fact, these aspects of Black Power could be actualized within the constitutional framework of the United States.[3] In fact, Martin Luther King, Jr. refused to denounce Black Power as a strategy, preferring only to criticize the slogan on the grounds that it could give the impression of anti-white feelings.[4] Still, when Carmichael infused his strategy with an emphasis on black political development, he became a symbol of militancy and controversy.

Ironically, Carmichael's actions before and after the Black Power stance did not project black nationalism, exclusively. In fact, Carmichael opposed the demand for the expulsion of SNCC's white organizers put forth by the Atlanta faction of SNCC in March of 1966.[5] Morover, Carmichael consistently rejected the notion that Black Power amounted to separatism. However, Carmichael's focus on African-American politics and his intent on establishing a position of power within the African-American community, independent of other groups, affirms Carmichael's politics as nationalism. Thus, Stokely Carmichael shifted his politics from integration to Black Power.

The methodology used in this research was a comparative historical analysis based on the works of political scientist, John McCartney and historians, Clayborne Carson, and Akinyele Umoja. This research used a political framework focusing on black political thought. This paradigm was used to analyze the historical moment in Stokely Carmichael's transition from civil rights integrationist to Black Power militant.

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[3] Carmichael's position would become more radical after 1966, when he began to advocate guerilla warfare and aligns himself with revolutionaries in other countries in Asia, Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America. He would ultimately advocate socialism, Pan-Africanism, and the ideas of Ghanaian revolutionary Kwame Nkrumah.

[4] Carson, 223.

[5] Ibid., 216.

Although the argument was made through an unmitigated historical relay of the facts, added support was given to the analysis through speeches made subsequent to Carmichael's rise to militant leadership status. The analysis further examined the backgrounds of both Carmichael and SNCC for early indications of potential difficulties or disharmony with the civil rights direction.

The year, 1966, presented many historical occurrences in the lives of African-Americans. That year, activist James Meredith, who, in 1963, became the first black student to graduate from the University of Mississippi, began what he called, "The March Against Fear." He planned to march from Memphis, Tennessee, to Jackson, Mississippi, in an effort to prove to Mississippi's black residents that they could exercise their rights without fear and to inspire them to register to vote. Meredith had only completed one day of his march when he was shot and wounded by a sniper's shotgun. In response, several civil rights organizations, including the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) decided to continue Meredith's march to Jackson.

On June, 1966, as the marchers entered Greenwood, Mississippi, and tried to erect tents on a black school ground for their nightly rally, they were met with resistance from local white police officers. The policemen would not allow the camp to be set up unless the marchers could produce proof of the school board's permission. This police request was strange as the marchers had followed the same procedure throughout their march without resistance. Stokely Carmichael complained about the deterrence and was arrested for defying a police order. After six hours, Carmichael was released. That night, Carmichael stood before an audience of protesters and shouted, "We been sayin' 'Freedom Now' for six years and we ain't got nothin'." What we gonna start sayin' now

is 'Black Power'"[6] The slogan electrified the audience and was quickly reported by the media who was there covering the march. By the mere use of two words, Carmichael propelled himself, SNCC, and the Movement into national controversy.

The press quickly branded Carmichael the leader of the Black Power Movement, as it was called by the radicals and militants of the era, beginning in the middle sixties and lasting to the early seventies. Consequently, with the title of leader of the Black Power Movement, Carmichael was bombarded with the task of explaining what Black Power meant. Whites felt uneasy about the term, reading into it a threat of violence, while, civil rights leaders, dependent on whites for financial and political support, feared that the choice of words could destroy what they considered to be major gains in the struggle for freedom. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "Black Power, means different things to different people and even different things to the same person on differing occasions."[7] However, his ambivalent comment did little to ease the tensions created by Carmichael's use of the words.

At the inception of the controversy caused by the slogan, Carmichael was not prepared to offer an analysis of what he meant. At best, he was overcome by the emotion of the moment when he used it. Nevertheless, within a month, Carmichael was able to offer some thought beyond emotional rhetoric. Carmichael connected the necessity for Black Power with arguments centered on the three central points: the importance of independent organization, the failure of nonviolence, and the evils of interracialism. Ironically, his arguments were all linked to issues he encountered as an organizer in SNCC. In fact, Stokely Carmichael's shift from civil rights integrationist to Black

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[6] Cynthia Griggs Fleming, *Soon We Will Not Cry: The Liberation of Ruby Doris Smith Robinson* (USA: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998,), 3.

[7] Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where do we go from here: Chaos or Community?* (New York: Harper & Rowe, 1968), 32.

Power militant was directly related to his experiences in SNCC, which included soured relationships with white liberals, the ineffectiveness of moral suasion, and the significance of black nationalist politics. Thus, the underlying premise is that SNCC also shifted in direct relation to Carmichael's shift in philosophy.

Even though there were a significant number of individuals who shared the same opinions as Carmichael, he, alone, was credited with vocalizing the malcontent by inadvertently capturing the media's attention. The historical facts revealed that SNCC's experiences during Freedom Summer, as well as its testing of more nationalist tactics in Alabama, were responsible for the philosophical shift that occurred. Carmichael's voice, as it occured in his speeches, further substantiates why he dismissed civil rights tactics for a more militant approach.

Therefore, this research is worthy of pursuing for two reasons. First, there is, at the present time, limited literary discourse on Kwame Ture, as Carmichael later became known. This, is problematic because he is viewed as a major catalyst of the Black Power Movement, as well as a cardinal player and contributor to the Civil Rights Movement. Second, there is continuous debate among critics of the Black Power Movement, as well as those who struggled in the Civil Rights Movement with Carmichael, over the philosophical shift in the Movement away from civil rights to Black Power.

Some historical critics contend that nonviolence was working and, thus, the shift to possible acts of violence was detrimental to the amelioration of the Civil Rights Movement. They explained that Carmichael's use of the Black Power slogan could only be equated with black separatism by white supporters and whites, in general.[8] With the Black Power Movement, Carmichael and his supporters proposed an alternative to the course previously followed by African-Americans to gain freedom and equality. In

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[8] Carson, 219.

fact, this Movement asked for or demanded something more than freedom and equality. These young people were talking about direct power; they were talking about Black Power. If they obtained what they wanted, the young, Black Power militants would gain something that black people had never known—tangible power. Tangible power meant that African-Americans would gain, maintain, and use power for their own self-interest. However, to fully understand the radical tactics and goals of the Black Power Movement, it is necessary to understand the overall goals of the Civil Rights Movement.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the African-American struggle for freedom centered on the acquisition of legal and civil rights. The strategy had always been to assimilate into the larger society. Prior to the 1960s, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People followed the reform agenda of legalism. They literally put the United States racist system on trial. By 1954, the legal battle had culminated into a victory. In the landmark case, *Brown vs. the Board of Education*, the U. S. Supreme Court declared that classifications based solely on race violated the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution.[9] The decision reversed the 1896 *Plessy vs. Ferguson* ruling that had established legal segregation (or the 'separate but equal' doctrine). The NAACP's team of lawyers included chief legal counsels, Charles H. Houston and Thurgood Marshall. After a series of favorable legal wins in higher education, the attorneys planned an attack on the "separate-but-equal" doctrine in primary and secondary schools.[10]

The Brown decision relied heavily on the research findings of social scientists

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[9] Daniel Levine, *Bayard Rustin and The Civil Rights Movement* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 77.

[10] Peter Levy, Ed., *Let Freedom Ring* (New York: Praeger, 1992), 31; Andrew Young, *An Easy Burden: The Civil Rights Movement and the Transformation of America* (United States: Harper Collins, 1996), 40.

such as social psychologist Kenneth B. Clark. Dr. Clark's research revealed that when one presented black children between the ages of three and seven with the choice between a brown doll or a white doll, the majority of each age group chose the white doll over the brown doll. The legal team was able to link the children's behavior to the adverse affect of prejudice and discrimination on the personality development of African-American children. Further, Clark declared that if black children were to develop positive self-identities instead of exhibiting self-rejection and self-denial, then segregated education had to end.[11]

Black Americans celebrated the *Brown* decision, but they may have been premature. A year later, the courts strengthened the earlier *Brown* decision by requiring school systems to desegregate with "all deliberate speed." Moreso, it gave the state courts the authority to decide whether their schools were acting in good faith towards the ruling.[12]

However, very few of the Southern states acted in good faith towards the *Brown* ruling. In fact, some states refused to accept the ruling. Virginia, for example, enacted laws that cut off state aid to desegregated schools, thereby forcing them to close.[13] One hundred and one members of Congress, from the Deep South, signed a Southern Manifesto, pledging to reverse the U.S. Supreme Court decision by any lawful means possible.[14] In 1957, Little Rock, Arkansas, was one of the first school systems to

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[11] Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (United States: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 152-153; Young, 113.

[12] Fred Powledge, *Free At Last: The Civil Rights Movement and the People Who made it* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1991), 67.

[13] Ibid., 164.

[14] Stewart Burns, ed., *Daybreak of Freedom: The Montgomery Bus Boycott* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 135.

desegregate. The decision led to a confrontation between the federal government and the State. Governor Orval Faubus sent National Guardsmen to prevent the integration by nine black students into Little Rock's Central High School.[15] President Dwight D. Eisenhower, a Republican, who had begun his career in the army and understood duty well, obtained a court injunction preventing Governor Faubus from interfering with the integration of Central High School. One thousand paratroopers were sent to Little Rock along with ten thousand Arkansas Guardsmen who were federalized to handle the mobs outside of the school.[16]

Thus, with the *Brown* case, the NAACP used legal means to reform the system. They believed that racial segregation was an evil force and not representative of the entire American system. The change the NAACP wanted was the inclusion of blacks into mainstream society without racial barriers. In fact, they were so inclined towards the American system that they used its constitution to prevail against it. They believed that, by battling against segregation at the highest academic level (high school) and then filtering down to the lower levels, they could lessen the fear of race-mixing that could cause hostility and result in the reluctance of white judges to meter out fair rulings. With the reform approach of legalism, the Civil Rights Movement was assuming that once the American public school system was forced to integrate, it would finally accept African-American students into its sphere. Unfortunately, laws did not always translate into practical reality within the Southern states. Consequently, as more laws were passed and more court battles were won in the struggle for racial equality, the South continued its practice of segregation.

Hence, in 1955, Montgomery, Alabama, was the scene of the next occurrence,

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[15] Powledge, 102.

[16] Ransby, 153.

which ushered in another phase of reform tactics used in the Civil Rights Movement. The new tactic was called nonviolent resistance. It augmented legalism with direct action. Although the purpose was still that of integration, the method was entirely different in that it took the battles out of the courts and into the streets.

On December 1, 1955, in Montgomery, Alabama, Rosa Parks, a seamstress and member of the local NAACP, was arrested for refusing to obey an age-old Southern law, which required blacks to yield their seats on public buses to white patrons. Four days later, the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) organized a massive citywide bus boycott, which was formed by Montgomery's black ministers and community leaders.[17] The boycott worked. Students, workers, children, and old people, all shared rides or walked to their destinations and back home. There was wide-scale participation by the black community. The enthusiasm of the community led to the commitment of the newly founded organization to continue the boycotts under the leadership of a very articulate and inspiring young leader named Martin Luther King, Jr. Reverend King was the newest minister in Montgomery. He had recently completed his doctoral course work at Boston University and the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church was his first ministerial assignment. He was chosen to lead the organization because he was a new minister, thus he had less to lose if the boycott failed.[18]

Consequently, at the first mass meeting held by the MIA, King's superior oration inspired the audience and articulated the early tenets of a philosophy of non-violent direct action, which served as the motivation for a Civil Rights Movement. The well-known Montgomery minister Ralph David Abernathy commented, as a respondent to the speech,

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[17] Burns, 82, 87; Clayborne Carson, *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, (New York: Warner Books, 1998), 50-53.

[18] Jervis Anderson, *Bayard Rustin: Troubles I've Seen* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997), 184; Burns, 1; Carson, 59.

"it was beautiful." Aldon D. Morris, a sociologist who studied organizational structures of the early Civil Rights Movement, concurred that, "King clearly understood the social power of oratory and used it."[19] King modestly replied to the accolades he received on his speaking talents. "I finally understood what the old preachers meant when they said, "open your mouth and God will speak for you."[20] He began by paying homage to Rosa Parks with the statement, "Mrs. Rosa Parks is a fine person. And since it had to happen, I'm happy it happened to a person like Mrs. Parks, for nobody can doubt the boundless outreach of her integrity. Nobody can doubt the height of her character, nobody can doubt the depth of her Christian commitment and devotion to the teachings of Jesus."[21] King's words brought into question the worthiness of African-Americans to equal rights based on the mere fact that they were Americans. He seemed to exemplify Mrs. Park's moral credentials as qualifiers of better treatment. Perhaps, if Mrs. Parks had portrayed suspect character in her life, her cause may have been overlooked. In fact, earlier that year, a young woman had been arrested for refusing to give up her seat, but because she was pregnant and was not married, a boycott was not attempted.[22] Perhaps King's preoccupation with Mrs. Park's character as well as the NAACP's focus on desegregating colleges first, were only reflections on the moralistic nature of the time period. However, both situations perhaps revealed the insecurity underlying the Civil Rights Movement. The Civil Rights Movement seemed to focus on acceptability based on morals or intelligence rather than acceptability based on humanity alone. Thus, King went on to spell out his course of action and his democratic sanction showing that:

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[19] Aldon D. Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York: The Free Press, 1984), 59.

[20] Burns, 94; Carson, 61.

[21] Clayborne Carson, et al., eds., *Eyes On The Prize Civil Rights Reader: Speech by Martin Luther King at Holt Street Baptist Church* (Penguin Books: New York, 1991), 49.

[22] Levy, 52.

> The only weapon that we have in our hands this evening is the weapon of protest. And secondly, this is the glory of America, with all of its faults. This is the glory of our democracy. . . . The great Glory of American democracy is the right to protest. . . . Our method will be that of persuasion, not coercion. We will only say to the people: 'Let your conscience be your guide.'[23]

The meeting ended with the resolution that Montgomery's black citizens would not ride the city's buses until arrangements could be made between the bus lines and a delegation of the black citizens to end the practice of segregated seating. The community was urged to work together to carpool whenever possible. Employers were urged to arrange transportation for their employees and cab drivers allowed citizens to ride at bus fare rates. Yet, even though this meant miles of walking, Montgomery's black citizens did not ride the buses for over a year.[24]

Moreover, the Montgomery boycott was a great opportunity for King to bridge philosophy with practice. Prior to the Civil Rights Movement, King had only read about nonviolent action through his study of Mahatma Gandhi. While in divinity school at Crozer, King became interested in Gandhi's principles of *ahimsa* (Sanskrit for non-harming or nonviolence). Gandhi's teachings, especially the belief that nonviolent resistance was not a passive weapon for social justice, but an active one that required enormous courage, impressed King.[25] At the time, King possessed only an intellectual understanding of the philosophy and had no thoughts of merging it into an organized effort. However, he conceived five elements, which he saw as essential to an understanding of nonviolent struggle. These were:

> First, 'Nonviolent resistance is not a method for cowards . . . It is the way of the strong. . . .and is not a method of stagnant passivity.' Second, it does

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[23] Joseph Alverez, *From Reconstruction to Revolution: The Black's Struggle for Equality* (United States: McClelland and Stewart, 1971), 140.

[24] Carson, 65-67.

[25] Ibid., 24.

> not seek the humiliation or defeat of the opponent but, rather, understanding and the awakening of a sense of morality. Third, it is aimed at the evil that one is trying to expunge, not at the persons involved. Fourth, the willingness to suffer any consequences is transformational. Fifth, the resister refuses to use violence but also rejects inward violence of the spirit and hate, choosing instead to reach for Love.[26]

King embarked on the boycott with this rudimentary understanding of nonviolent resistance. However, as the struggle continued, he was able to increase his own understanding as well as impart knowledge to others. One of his greatest assets in this process was an organizer named Bayard Rustin. Rustin was a disciple of activist, A. Phillip Randolph, head of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. Rustin had also served as chair of the Free India Committee in the United States, and had studied Gandhi's campaigns for six months in India.[27] One of the techniques of nonviolent resistance, which Rustin imparted to King, was the necessity of being a faithful example of nonviolence at all times. A second technique was the skillful use of being arrested for nonviolent resistance. He explained to King that as the leader, he had to make sure that those around him did not keep guns on their person. Even his bodyguards, should not be allowed to carry guns. Also, he forbade King to keep a gun in his house.[28] Like most southerners, King kept a gun in his house for the protection of his family.[29] However, Rustin convinced King that keeping guns under any circumstance was contradictory to nonviolent principles. He went on to explain that going to jail was an essential part of the struggle which should be approached gladly as a chance to suffer for one's beliefs and

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[26] Mary King, *Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Power of Nonviolent Action*, (Paris: UNESCO, 1999), 101.

[27] Burns, 21.

[28] Anderson, 185, 188.

[29] David Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, 1955-1968*, (New York: W. Morrow, 1986), 73.; Adam Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King, Jr.*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 25.

exemplify one's depth of commitment.[30] Finally, one of the most important lessons King learned from his Montgomery experience was that moral persuasion had to be accompanied by direct action. In other words, the success of the boycott depended on a mass refusal to ride the buses, a refusal that hurt the city financially. This came to be an invaluable lesson later as King continued his pursuit of desegregation.[31]

Thus, the Montgomery boycott lasted for over a year. King continuously worked at driving the philosophy into the minds of the community through regular mass meetings that were organized around sermons and spirituals that reinforced Gandhi's teachings. The city passed a law requiring cab drivers to charge minimum fares higher than bus fares and when that did not work, mass arrests of black drivers suddenly increased.[32] Seven weeks into the boycott, white extremists tested King's commitment to nonviolence. On January 30, 1956, while King was attending a mass meeting, his home was bombed. As hundreds of angry blacks assembled around King's house, the policemen began to push the people around in an effort to clear the streets. Some of the people were armed and prepared for confrontation. King responded by telling the crowd, "Go home and put down your weapons. We cannot solve this problem through retaliatory violence . . . we must meet hate with love."[33] After the incident, King continued to receive threatening telephone calls and other bombings occurred. Still, he remained nonviolent and the boycott continued embracing the philosophy of non-violence.

After the MIA's request for fair boarding and seating on the buses was denied by the city, the MIA took the local law enforcement unit to federal court. After a lengthy

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[30] Fairclough, 103-105.

[31] Carson, 188

[32] Burns, 103-105.

[33] Mary King, 117.

battle, the Supreme Court ruled on November 13, 1956, that segregation on Montgomery's buses was unconstitutional.[34] King urged the people to approach the buses cautiously. Several instructional sessions were given on nonviolent techniques. In the sessions, individuals learned to conduct themselves in a nonviolent, non-intimidating manner. They were further instructed, in writing, to refrain from sitting near white people whenever possible, to ask politely before sitting down near a white person, and to refrain from retaliating if they were cursed or assaulted.[35]

The success of the boycott increased King's faith in the principles of non-violence and propelled him to national stature. The ideas of nonviolent direct action were replicated in other cities and other organizations. Bus boycotts started up in Atlanta, Tallahassee, Florida, and other Southern communities with the "Montgomery way" as the mode.[36]

In 1957, Martin Luther King, Jr. moved to Atlanta and, with the help of fellow activists Bayard Rustin, Stanley Levison, and Ella Baker, he organized the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), which was an organization comprised of sixty other black preachers who believed in the principles of nonviolence as a tool for a mass struggle against segregation. The group, its philosophy, and most of all, its leader, became the leading force of the Civil Rights Movement.

By this time, the Civil Rights Movement was escalating. It challenged state laws, which segregated whites and blacks and did not allow blacks to practice their constitutional rights, such as voting. America watched as thousands of blacks marched and challenged restaurant owners and public facilities officials by refusing to accept

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[34] Levy, 86.

[35] Carson, 96.

[36] Fairclough, 44.

being relegated to "colored" areas. Many African-Americans saw how brutal the southern whites could be when they were confronted with the possibility of changes to their way of life. The goal of this Movement was reform that called for full integration into society. The strategy was nonviolent direct action and it was successful for a while. However, when it became unsuccessful, some African-Americans sought another strategy and another goal.

Overall, it appeared that most African-Americans believed that Dr. King's philosophy of Christian nonviolence would work. He seemed to be influential with both black and white people based on the fact that thousands of blacks and whites traveled to Washington, in 1963, to join him in his March on Washington.[37] Surely, the South would listen. Not only was the African-American community hopeful, they were also watching the media coverage. Television was the mode by which millions caught glimpses of black marchers: men, women, and children being brutally attacked by police, their dogs and high velocity water hoses.[38] What more could be done to appeal to this country? In particular, the black youth of America began to demand swifter answers. According to John T. McCartney, optimism by moralists reached its peak in 1963. However, by 1966, much of the euphoria of the early Civil Rights Movement and the belief in the efficacy of nonviolence dissipated.[39] Floyd McKissick added that nonviolence was a dying philosophy, which had outlived its usefulness.[40] Out of this climate, especially the loss of momentum for nonviolence, the Black Power Movement emerged.

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[37] John McCartney, *Black Power Ideologies: An Essay in African-American Political Thought* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 94.

[38] Levy, 173.

[39] McCartney, 95-96.

[40] William L. VanDeburg, *New Day In Babylon: The Black Power Movement And American Culture, 1965-1975* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 134.

The Black Power Movement was different from the Civil Rights Movement in that it was not a nonviolent integrationist-directed Movement. Acceptance into the society was no longer the goal. This Movement called for African-Americans to build a separate power base for themselves within the American system and for white Americans to move out of the way so that they could do it. This was a radical goal in that it deviated from the one previously sought. Still, more radical was the tactic for reaching the goal of Black Power: not to ask for it, but to seize it.

Moreover, historians of the Movement noted that, "Black Power first articulated a mood rather than a program-disillusionment and alienation from white America, race pride, and self respect or 'black consciousness' came out of a spirit of rage."[41] "There comes a point beyond which people cannot be expected to endure prejudice, oppression and deprivation or they will explode."[42] The problems that made it necessary to refocus and re-channel energies into a more assertive Movement were injustices, economic hardships, and the perceived failure of legalism and nonviolent action. These issues were interdependent and hit the low-income community hardest. Low-income blacks were the ones who experienced the bulk of police brutality, educational inferiority, and political exploitation, among other injustices.

During the early sixties, the average black family was economically impoverished. In fact, 55.1 percent of the African-American population was below the poverty line at the beginning of 1960.[43] Black unemployment rates were double those of whites and jobs for the non-college educated were low-paying and menial.[44] In most

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[41] Gene Roberts, "The Story of SNCC," *Black Protest in the Sixties*, August Meir and Elliot Rudwick, eds., (Chicago: New York Times/ Quadrangle, 1970), 18.

[42] Ibid., 156.

[43] Fred R. Harris and Roger W. Wilkins, Ed., *Quiet Riots: Race and Poverty in the United States* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1967, 1988), 50.

[44] Levy, 228; J. Boger and J. Wegner, *Race, Poverty, and American Cities* (Chapel Hill:

cities, slums and ghettoes housed the majority of African-American families. Further, government programs were so meager that they functioned more as insults rather than help.[45] The few jobs created through legislation required higher education. This alienated many African-Americans who, at this time, held the highest rates of high school dropout.[46] For too many African-Americans, daily life consisted of the struggles for jobs, decent education, and housing. Though integration legislation had been passed almost a decade earlier, in 1966, southern and northern schools were still segregated and unequal.[47]

In addition to economic inequality, lower income African-Americans faced extreme police brutality. Often black youth were gunned down by police with no legal repercussions or even an investigation. The community was too poor to take legal recourse and their complaints were largely ignored. Radical activist, Huey Newton called the "occupation" of white policemen in Black communities comparable to a "Police State."[48]

Still, the most prevalent reason for the emergence of the Black Power Movement was the hopelessness created by the lack of progress through previous civil rights methods. The African-American community had been economically and politically deprived for most of its existence in this country; however, somehow leaders had always provided hope that through patience and new methods, relief would come soon. Moreso, with the small, but significant, successes of each new effort, there seemed reason to hope.

University. of North Carolina Press, 1996), 21.

[45] Boger and Wegner, 9, 14-15.

[46] Harris and Wilkins, 14.

[47] Ibid., 103.

[48] Levy, 173; Huey P. Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide* (New York: Ballantine, 1974), 134-135, 176-177.

Still, perhaps injustice is most hateful and intolerable when it lifts off blinders only long enough to provide a glimpse of what would be denied indefinitely.

There was another significant issue precipitating the Black Power Movement. In 1964, the dwellers of many urban ghettoes rioted. There were so many riots that summer that it was termed "the long hot summer." Riots broke out initially in Los Angeles followed by other cities such as Detroit, Nework, and Washington D.C. Many leaders such as Malcolm X and even Senator Robert Kennedy predicted that the ghettoes were ripe for explosion. One scholar commented, "By mid-1967, there had been riots in 31 cities."[49]

The rioters did not take the time to explain or philosophize about the riots. They were speaking through their actions. However, many sympathetic onlookers interpreted the riots as representative of the symptoms of police brutality, segregated housing, segregated schools, economic exploitation of ghetto residents, tokenism in employment practices, the indifference of white politicians, and the inadequacy of the federal anti-poverty program experienced by the rioters. Though the damage and harm was most noted in the Black community, neither property nor life seemed that important to the rioters. Kenneth B. Clark observed, "at the height of the Harlem riots of 1964 young Negroes could be heard to say, 'If I don't get killed tonight, I'll come back tomorrow.' There is evidence that these outbreaks are suicidal, reflecting the ultimate in self-negation, self-rejection and hopelessness."[50] More so, with regard to property, the rioters of Watts yelled, "burn, baby, burn."[51]

Ironically, most of the riots of that summer were sparked by possible police

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[49] Lewis Killian, *The Impossible Revolution*, (New York: Random House, 1968), 109.

[50] Meier and Rudwick, eds., *Black Protest in the Sixties*, 108.

[51] Ibid.

brutality.[52] The African-American community faced police brutality and harassment continuously, but evidently they never became desensitized to it. Thus, whereas the larger society may view occurrences of police brutality as unfortunate and rare, the "prisoners of the ghetto interpret them as cruel and humiliating."[53] The violence in the urban poor communities erupted so often that fear finally incited white America. In response to the violence, President Lyndon B. Johnson established a committee to study the problem and determine its cause.

Therefore, the Kerner Report was commissioned by President Johnson to examine the circumstances behind the riots that had broken out in major urban areas of the United States in the late 1960s. It was published with the conclusion that African-Americans were suffering solely from economic ills. Too many blacks were working hard, but few were realizing the American dream in comparison to white America. The commission's report tagged the principle motivation of Black Power as the "frustrations of powerlessness." It also concluded that, unless immediate and long-term actions were taken, the nation would move quickly toward two separate Americas, one black and one white."[54]

Many African-Americans recognized that their communities were erupting due to powerlessness and inequality. They did not need social scientific verification of the challenges and struggles which African-Americans faced daily. Furthermore, had America really been concerned about people of African descent, the violence that preceded the study would not have occurred. After the commission published its report in 1968, the United States government took no major action to rectify the situation or

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[52] Harris and Wilkins, 9.

[53] Meier and Rudwick, 110.

[54] Ibid, 111.

rebuild the destroyed communities. Though the Kerner Report concluded that the deeply rooted problems growing out of a history of racial discrimination demanded intervention or they would become worse and the consequences greater, Johnson was fighting a losing battle with a conservative Congress intent on blocking funds for social programs. Thus, the recommendations of the Kerner Report—for upgrading ghetto education, subsidized housing, and job training—were largely ignored.[55]

Therefore, the Black Power Movement proposed a different set of rules for alleviating the injustices of racism in the lives of African-Americans. However, similar to the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Power Movement could not be relegated to monolithic terms. Still, the three most widely discussed objectives of the Black Power Movement were community control, Black consciousness, and self-defense. As previously mentioned, these objectives were met with immense disapproval from both mainstream Black leaders and white liberals. They wanted the Civil Rights Movement to continue on the course of non-violent protest and moral appeals, and strong relationships with white allies and sympathizers. However, time had given African-Americans, especially African-American youth, the understanding that the oppressor would not concede power to them morally or lawfully. Therefore, different options were pursued. The premise of Black Power was to discontinue tactics that had proven inefficient in the Civil Rights Movement. In addition, the Movement conceived that African-Americans did not have an indefinite amount of time to devote to a vacillating dream. The time seemed fertile for self-sufficiency and systematic strategies for taking up power directly rather than waiting for it to be shared.

The first focus of the Black Power Movement was community control. Therein lay a multifaceted undertaking. Generally, African-American communities would be

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[55] Boger and Wegner, 13.

required to act almost totally independent of whites. As Carmichael often explained, black businesses would have to be established and supported by blacks. Black schools would be run entirely by African-Americans. But, most importantly, African-American communities would operate as voting blocks. In order to get their votes, which would be collective, politicians would have to respond to black concerns. No agencies, such as the police or welfare services would be allowed to persist in their incontestable state. Agencies would be reconstructed by the black community into viable and palatable presences. [56]

The point of dissension with community control lay with its stress on black separation. It perturbed liberals and integrationists that these Black separatist practices would be a rebuff to those whites who had fought and died for equal rights. Nevertheless, at this point, many African-Americans were ready to go it alone.

The second phase of Black Power, black consciousness, did even less to ease the fears of whites. Perhaps because of the Black Power Movement, African-Americans were encouraged to love and accept themselves, to study and take pride in their culture. While different groups, as far back as Marcus Garvey, had advanced this idea, it had never taken on the mass acceptance of the sixties. There was a push for what was then called Black Studies programs and Black History books. Black skin and hair were acceptable because many black people embraced the notion that "Black is beautiful."[57]

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[56] Robert E. Wright, "Black Capitalism: Toward Controlled Development of Black America," *Negro Digest* 19 (December 1969): 28-29; Earl Ofari, *The Myth of Black Capitalism* (New York: Monthly Review, 1970), 122-23; James Boggs, "The Myth and Irrationality of Black Capitalism, "*Review of Black Political Economy* 1 (Spring-Summer 1970), 31-35; Kwame Ture and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 171-73; Milton C. Coleman, " A Cultural Approach to Education," *Negro Digest* 18 (March 1969): 33,35-36,38.

[57] Larry Neal, "Black Art and Black Liberation," *The Black Revolution: An Ebony Special Issue* (1970): 49; Karenga, *Introduction To Black Studies*(Los Angeles: University of Sankore Press, 1982), 21-24; Nathan Hare, "What Should Be the Role of Afro-American Education in the Undergraduate Curriculum?," *Liberal Education* 55 (March 1969): 36.

At first glance, it seems unquestionable that a group's self-perception will change along with its politics. For instance, when integration was the goal, it may have seemed necessary to adopt the dominant society's norms and culture in an attempt to demonstrate an adaptable attitude. Ironically, in the absence of a push for acceptance from another group, greater self-acceptance grew within the African-American community.[58]

Finally, the position of Black Power, which most frightened white America was the premise of self-defense. The Black Power Movement was not one of non-violent acquiescence. The Movement was termed "a revolution" because it espoused a belief that death would be better than living a humiliating, degrading and hopeless existence. Thus, there would be no Christian-inspired, "turning of the cheek."[59] This Movement worshipped radicals such as Malcolm X and Frantz Fanon, both of whom believed that freedom does not come without armed resistance.[60] Malcolm X said, "Any Negro who teaches Negroes to turn the other cheek in the face of attack is disarming that Negro of his God-given right, of his moral right, of his natural right, of his intelligent right to defend himself." Malcolm X unmasked white apprehensions when he added "everything in nature can defend itself and is right in defending itself except the American Negro."[61]

Ironically, Black Power did not appear significantly until after Malcolm X's death in 1965. For inspiration, the Black Power Movement utilized other black thinkers and

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[58] VanDeBurg, 194; Maulana Karenga, *Kwanzaa: Origin, Concepts, Practice* (Los Angeles: Kawaida, 1977), 53-54.

[59] John A. Williams, *This is My Country Too* (New York: New American Library, 1966), 41, 75, 156-57.

[60] Lee Lockwood, *Conversations with Eldridge Cleaver: Algiers* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970), 90; James Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 451; Ted Stewart, "Fanon: New Messiah of Black Militants," *Sepia* 20 (December 1971), 30.

[61] James H. Cone, *Martin and Malcolm and America* (New York: Orbis, 1991), 107.

philosophers. Fanon, whose *Wretched of the Earth* was relevant reading for the Black Power Movement, explained that violence is a creation of the oppressor, so that he understands *only* violence, thus, he concedes nothing without it. In discussing the oppressed, Fanon stated, "the settler has shown him(the oppressed) the way he should take if he is to be free."[62] Still, the Black Power Movement did not make violence its theme; it simply exempted itself from nonviolence. Though Black Power organizations differed on when violence should be used, most ascribed to Malcolm X's belief that Black people should arm themselves for self-defense.

The Black Power Movement changed the way African-Americans thought of themselves. African-Americans were demanding to live better and voicing their discontent by rioting and embracing new ideas and political groups. Though there were many vocal leaders at this time, it was Stokely Carmichael who gave meaning to the Movement. He articulated the meaning of Black Power in a way that it could be understood by relating it to the circumstances that black people were experiencing at that time. In fact, his experiences in SNCC paralleled the hardships that African-American youth were experiencing. While Carmichael was working within the Civil Rights Movement and using civil rights tactics, African-American youth were watching the civil rights struggles on television. Consequently, Carmichael's disillusionment with the Civil Rights Movement's goals and tactics became their disillusionment. Thus, when Carmichael discovered the possibilities of Black Power, many in the African-American community, especially the youth, were ready to listen. However, before he would call for Black Power, Carmichael had to experience the challenges of working in the Civil Rights Movement. His years organizing in SNCC not only soured him on integrationist tactics, but also helped propel him towards the militant idea of creating an African-American

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[62] Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1963), 53.

political power base within the American system.

CHAPTER 2

Stokely Carmichael: His Story

Stokely Carmichael was often described by his SNCC comrades as being a highly intelligent young man who spoke with a West Indian and a New York accent in the same sentence. A brief look at Carmichael's life prior to SNCC reveals that he earned the description. His early life is viewed in three phases which include the following: first, his West Indian background; second, his experiences growing up in New York; and third, his submergence into activism as a student at Howard University. Each phase of his growth is important in that it contributed to the development of the Stokely Carmichael who later emerges as one of SNCC's most controversial leaders.

"Little man"

Stokely Carmichael was born in 1941, in Port of Spain, Trinidad, an island in the Caribbean Sea. At the time, Trinidad was part of the British Commonwealth and ruled by the government of Great Britain. However, the indigenous population was fighting the British subjugators for their rights. Blacks mostly populated Trinidad and blacks held many important posts; however, economic and political controls were in the hands of the rich white planters who did not live on the island.[1] Most of the blacks were descended

[1] B. Weinraub, "The Brilliancy Of Black," *Esquire*, January 1967, 133.

from African slaves who were brought to the Caribbean to work on sugarcane plantations. After emancipation in 1833, the planter class imported indentured servants from India and China to replace the freed slaves[2] Thus, the white planters continued to make enormous profits from their crops, while paying the black and Indian workers very low wages. In order to gain better pay and labor practices, the blacks in Trinidad began the long hard fight for elected representation in their government. They fought for these measures from emancipation, in 1838, until the late 1940s. The problem was that the British government did not want to give majority vote to the black working class which they considered largely uneducated. The working class responded by forming their own labor organizations, striking, and finally rioting. The government made a few limited concessions to the middle-class black community. In 1925, the government agreed to the election of seven officials to be elected by real estate owners and high income earners. Still, these measures were largely appeasement, with no real thrust towards reform.[3] Thus, the working-class continued to suffer from low wages paid by the planters.

Carmichael was more fortunate than many of the children in Port of Spain. His father was a skilled carpenter and he was able to provide a good living for his family. Carmichael grew up in a large house and was provided a British education. He showed early signs of above-average intelligence and was described as being wise beyond his age. Thus, his family often referred him to as "little man." For instance, at the age of seven,

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[2] B. Weinraub, "The Brilliancy of Black," Esquire, January 1967, 133.

[3] Kelvin Singh, *Race and Class Struggles in a Colonial State* (Caribbean: University of the West Indies, 1994), 2-11.

young Carmichael walked himself to the polls on Election Day and tried to vote.[4] He admired a candidate named Uriah Butler, an activist who fought for better wages and working conditions for the working class of Trinidad and whose imprisonment for encouraging a strike triggered riots in 1937. Prior to the strikes, Butler was a reformist who tried to appeal to the British government, but took a strike approach when the government did not respond to his appeals.[5] After being sent home because he was too young, Carmichael pleaded with his aunt to go to the polls and vote.

Harlem

Adolphus Carmichael moved his family to the United States when Stokely was seven-years old. He thought it would offer them better opportunities. Life in Trinidad was a constant struggle against a class system, which determined everything about a person's life from where he worked to what he ate. The caste system was supported by the government, which sought to keep power and money in the hands of the white elite.

The family moved to Harlem, a large black community in New York City. For the Carmichael family, life in Harlem was different from that in Trinidad. In Harlem, the family struggled while Carmichael's father worked to feed and clothe a family of seven. Adolphus Carmichael worked two jobs and went to school at night to study electricity.

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[4] Weinraub, 133.

[5] Bridget Brereton, *A History of Modern Trinidad 1783-1962* (Caribbean: Heinemann, 1981), 180-181.

The family of nine lived in a three-room flat.[6] Apartment dwellers in Harlem in the 1950s paid some of the highest rents in the city, but they lived in the worst conditions. Even with the urban renewal of the 1950s, Harlem remained overcrowded with old tenements and apartments that were dilapidated, infested with vermin, and stinking with neglect.[7] However, there was also another side of Harlem. It had a striving criminal life, which included the numbers racket, prostitution, and gambling.[8] Often, these were also run by outside elements. Ironically, Harlem also boasted a large number of churches in the 1950s. Some of them, had been in Harlem before 1914, when black churches began to purchase the buildings from whites. Three of the most important black churches were Bethel African Methodist Episcopal, African Methodist Episcopal Zion better known as Mother Zion, and St. Philip's Protestant Episcopal.

Though, it was also mostly black, there were few blacks in positions of authority in Harlem in the 1950's. There were plenty of stores, bars, concessions, theaters, and apartment houses, all for the most part owned by white males who lived outside of the community.[9] The goods from most of the establishments were overpriced and below

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[6] Weinraub, 133.

[7] Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto* (Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, 1963),193; Richard Lincoln, "Crime Wave? Who's Speaking?," *Amsterdam News*, 10 May 1952; "War Against Rats Pushed," *The New York Times*, 20 June 1952; Warren J. Halliburton and Ernest Kaiser, *Harlem: A History of Broken Dreams* (New York: Zenith Books, 1974), 78.

[8] Louis Seaton, "Inside Story of Numbers Racket," *Amsterdam News*, 21 August 1954; Vernon Sinclair, "Who Protects Prostitutes?," *Amsterdam News*, 7 August 1954.

[9] Kenneth B. Clark, *Dark Ghetto: Dilemmas of Social Power* (New York: Harper and Row,

standard. Yet, installment buying, with its attendant profit for the lender through high interest rates, was a practice designed to entangle Harlem residents in a lifetime of debt.[10]

In 1952, Harlem was a crowded and noisy place. It offered more excitement than Carmichael had seen on the island. It was full of things for a young man to get into, including crime. Carmichael quickly became a member of one of the numerous gangs and delved into petty crime. Carmichael confesses, "By the time I was in eighth grade, I knew all about marijuana and pot."[11] Politically, Harlem was the center of nationalist activity. Harlem's street corners offered the platform for many famous and infamous orators. Some of its matriculates included, Malcolm X, Sekou Ture, Kwame Nkrumah, and Patrice Labumba. According to Bob Brown, Camichael's personal secretary for thirty-two years, Lewis Michaux's bookstore was a popular nationalist meeting place, which Carmichael frequented.[12]

Once he arrived in Harlem, Carmichael's father was not deterred by the realities of American life. He continued to try to prove that an honest, hardworking black man could make it in America. He and his wife Mabel were determined to move their family out of the cramped apartment in Harlem. There were too many vices available to lure their

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1965), 23; Halliburton and Kaiser, 57.

[10] Halliburton and Kaiser, 93.

[11] Lerone Bennett, Jr., "Stokely Carmichael: Architect of Black Power," *Ebony*, September 1966, 34.

[12] Charlie Cobb, "Revolution: From Stokely Carmichael to Kwame Ture," *The Black Scholar* 27, no. 3-4 (Fall/Winter 1997): 34; Director Bob Brown of the Kwame Ture Work-Study Institute and Library, Conakry, Guinea, interviewed by author, 19 March 2001, Department of African-American

children. Adolphus Carmichael worked as a carpenter and a cab driver, while Mabel Carmichael sometimes worked as a maid. Carmichael recalls bitterly how hard his father worked:

> My father really worked hard, day and night. There were times when I didn't see him for a week. He'd get up in the morning and leave for his regular job-he was a carpenter-then have an odd job on the side, so he'd probably eat at my aunt's house downtown and go to his odd job, and after that he'd drive a taxi, and then he'd come back and go to sleep. By that time, I'd be in bed... He died in early 1962. He was a man in his late forties. It was a heart attack. We think he died of hard work...[13]

There were many West Indians in Harlem who had similar ideas to Adolphus Carmichael about America and work. In fact, West Indians were notorious in Harlem for working very hard and holding numerous jobs. They were also known for harboring condescending attitudes towards African-Americans.[14] Many felt that American blacks were poor simply because they were lazy. Historian James Traub explains the West Indian work ethic with, "Two objectives drive West Indians to work long and hard hours: owning a house and getting an education. They work fanatically hard, save money, and get an education, if not for themselves, then for their children"[15] Whereas American blacks often complained of discrimination, West Indians somehow worked around it and succeeded in spite of it.

Studies, Georgia State University, Atlanta, Georgia.

[13] Howard Zinn, *SNCC: The New Abolitionists* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), 55.

[14] Holger Henke, *The West Indian Americans* (London: Greenwood Press, 2001), 53.

[15] James Traub, "You Can Get It If You Really Want," *Harpers*, June 1982, 28, 30.

Hence, researchers such as Holger Henke and James Traub suggest that while West Indians have a history of actively fighting racism, as in the case of Garvey, Carmichael, and others, they are often reluctant to attribute social or economic misfortune to it.[16] West Indian politician, Shirley Chisholm offers the explanation that slavery in the islands was not as destructive an experience as it was in the United States. Families were not broken up as much and abolition came earlier, and with much less trouble. Racial barriers were not as strict. Thus, "blacks from the islands tend to have less fear of white people, and, therefore, less hatred of them." She continues, "They can meet whites as equals; this is harder for American blacks."[17] Yet, historian Dennis Forsythe infers that the success of West Indians is directly related to the fact that their cultural orientation is similar to America's. In other words, "every phase and aspect of the West Indian experience have imbued them with the Protestant 'spirit'"[18] Another historian, Joyce Justus maintains that West Indians adopt psychological distances and attitudes towards the American society, its institutions, and even its black community. "This enables them to tolerate and withstand prejudice and discrimination in the pursuit of their objectives. But in doing so, generally, they do not accept the view of themselves as negative individually or as a group."[19] Regardless of the reason or reasons behind the successful maneuvering of

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[16] Henke, 53; James Traub, 28.

[17] Chisholm, Shirley, *Shirley Chisholm: Unbought and Unbossed* (New York: Avon Books, 1970), 90.

[18] Palmer (quoting Forsythe), 22.

West Indians in Harlem, hard work and perseverance were definitely part of the equation. Those qualities were the most easily observed in West Indians like Stokely Carmichael's father.

After several years of working extremely hard, Adolphus Carmichael succeeded in buying a house in a good middle-class neighborhood in the Italian section of the Bronx. Although the family had more room than they did in Harlem, the neighborhood was not as good as Adolphus may have imagined. Young Carmichael continued to get into trouble and to associate with bad influences even though he played piano at Sunday school at church and was a member of the Boy Scouts. Stokely ran with the local Italian gang called the Morris Park Avenue Dukes.[20] Even more contrary to his father's perception about the new neighborhood, Carmichael revealed that the white boys in the Bronx were much better criminals than the ones he ran with in Harlem. "Those Harlem cats were in petty crime. Those white boys taught me what crime was," Carmichael reveals.[21] In a very short time, Carmichael was stealing hubcaps, radios, and cars.

Gradually, Carmichael left the gang and the stealing behind to pursue the middle class goals imbued by his parents. Education was a very important part of Stokely Carmichael's upbringing. Although neither of his parents finished high school, books lined

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[19] Ibid., 24-25

[20] Weinraub, 130-5; Gordon Parks, "Whip of Black Power," SNCC Papers, Chairman's Files, Auburn Avenue Research Library, Atlanta, Georgia.

[21] Bennett, 34; Weinraub, 133.

the shelves of their home. Carmichael was intelligent, and attended schools for honor students, which were usually predominantly white. In order to keep up with his classmates who were wealthier and more exposed, Carmichael was an avid reader. His academic record was so impressive, that in 1956, he was allowed to take the examination for the elite Bronx High School of Science.[22] He was accepted into the school, where he began to associate with a more elite group of white people including the children of some Socialist/Communist leaders, who were known as the "red diaper babies." In fact, according to Bob Brown, Carmichael sat in front of Eugene Dennis Jr. whose father was the Communist party head being investigated for communist activity.[23] In Cobb's article Carmichael is quoted as saying, "Spending nights there, (Dennis' house) I met Gus Hall and lots of those folks,"[24] Carmichael became interested in socialism and communism; however, he never joined either group. He could not quite merge either socialism or communism with what he had not yet identified as his penchant for nationalism.[25]

As a gifted black, Carmichael was invited into the integrated Park Avenue and Greenwich Village cliques. Inevitably, he began the process of self-hate and white adoration, which sometimes accompanies acceptance into largely white-dominated settings. He was sharply awakened to the differences between them when he visited their

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[22] Bennett, 31; Weinraub, 133; Parks, 80.

[23] Brown.

[24] Cobb, 34.

[25] Bennett, 36.

Park Avenue apartments and saw the black maids. He intimated to one of his close friends that he often felt that it could have been his mother serving them.[26] Still, he took advantage of his opportunities by making straight A's and graduating with honors.

In his senior year of high school, Stokely Carmichael became interested in the Civil Rights Movement. Initially, he was not impressed by the sit-ins, which he read about in the newspaper. He believed that the student protesters were simply trying to get their names in the paper. In spite of this, after visiting the South and witnessing the conditions himself, Carmichael decided to get involved. One of his first acts of protest was to join the New York Chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality in picketing a Woolworth store.[27] He also volunteered in youth marches organized by activist Bayard Rustin in Washington, D.C. in 1959.[28]

Stokely Carmichael's academic record was so outstanding that he received numerous scholarship offers from prestigious schools such as Harvard. He refused them all and instead, Carmichael chose to attend Howard University, an all-black school in Washington. D.C. Carmichael wanted to stay close to the Civil Rights Movement and he wanted to be near black people. The Civil Rights Movement purged Carmichael of his self-hate. He was able to see himself as black and gained a sense of pride from that fact.

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[26] Parks, 80; Weinraub, 133.

[27] Parks, 32.

[28] Cobb, 34.

John Lewis, one of Carmichael's major opponents in SNCC, revealed that he saw this type of transformation frequently among northern organizers. Of the group, Lewis said, "It's interesting that some of the people who were most outspoken in asserting their black identity and disassociating themselves from whites were the ones who had grown up among and been very close to whites and who had, in many cases, disowned their own background."[29] In a discussion about the period of denial in his life, Carmichael admitted in an interview, "Yeah, man, I was in that bag. I've been there. I know."[30]

Stokely Carmichael chose to attend Howard University partly because he wanted to be near the Civil Rights Movement. However, he soon found that neither the administration nor the students were very committed to the struggle for civil rights. Howard University was an elite University, formed in 1867 to educate African-Americans. When Carmichael entered its doors in 1960, it was still trying to maintain its image of an elite university, comparable to those white universities of similar stature. According to Carmichael's classmate at Howard University, Cleveland Sellers, in order to conform to the image of the university, young men wore suits to class and young ladies, stockings and heels. Sellers further infers that Howard, like many black schools at that time, frowned upon student protest and rebellion. He attributes the school's attitudes to the fact that whites funded most African-American universities.[31] Ekwueme Michael Thelwell, a

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[29] John Lewis, *Walking With the Wind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998), 297.

[30] Bennett, 35.

[31] Cleveland Sellers, *The River of No Return* (Jackson and London: University Press of

comrade of Sellers and Carmichael further comments:

> Stunted elements of the administration, faculty, and large numbers of the students seemed to have internalized the most vulgar aspects of White American culture: gross materialism, conspicuous consumption, status anxiety, social climbing, class snobbery and most aggravating, the handkerchief headed 19th century notion that the mission of 'Negro Education' was to 'civilize' us young Negroes, thus rendering us 'responsible and acceptable' to White American sensibilities, thereby to uplift the race.[32]

According to Dr. David Dorsey, professor of African-American Studies, "schools like Howard felt that it was their responsibility to uplift the race through demonstrations of worthiness. A major element of that was the rejection of all things black. The general atmosphere at Howard, in particular was "yes, I'm black, but I'm O.K."[33] He further comments that Howard subscribed to the notion of worthiness as it geared its curriculum towards that of other white schools. No black authors could be introduced into Humanities reading requirements and "the Dean of Fine Arts famously declared that jazz would never profane the precincts of Crampton Auditorium so long as he was the Dean."[34] The school also prided itself on being the only black school to offer Latin. Latin instruction lent prestige to the school because at that time, only those who knew Latin could claim to be truly educated. With this upwardly mobile thinking, focused on

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Mississippi, 1973),57-58.

[32] Ekwueme Michael Thelwell, "The Professor and the Activists: A Memoir of Sterling Brown," *Massachusetts Review* 40, no. 4 (Winter 99/2000): 617-22.

[33] David Dorsey, interview by author, 27 January 2001, Atlanta, Georgia.

[34]Dorsey; Thelwell, 617-22.

maintaining the black middle-class, Howard's administration was hostile towards most civil rights activity. In fact, Dorsey intimated that those students found to be absent from class for participation in demonstrations received greater punishments than those absent for other reasons. Students involved in the Civil Rights Movement were considered agitators by Howard University's administration. Moreover, Howard University's Law school had been principle in the NAACP's court battles. Howard graduates, such as Charles Houston and Thurgood Marshal, had served as Special Counsels for the NAACP, according to Dr. James M. Nabrit, President of Howard University, who also participated in preparing the briefs for every major civil rights case between 1927 and 1954.[35] Thus, positioning the school behind the NAACP's use of legalism as an acceptable form of protest against racism was based on the teachings of Charles Houston. It was not until April 26, 1965 that Howard University even commented on the Civil Rights Movement. Howard University's President, James M. Nabrit Jr., presented a statement on student and faculty participation in civil protest and political activities. He pointed out that those who participated in such activities "did so as individual citizens and not as representatives of Howard University."[36]

Ironically, most of the student body complied eagerly with the University's position as advocated by Nabrit. Ed Brown and Cleveland Sellers, both students in

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[35] Rayford W. Logan, *Howard University: The First Hundred Years 1867-1967* (New York: New York University Press, 1969), 560.

[36] Ibid., 563.

attendance at Howard University during this period, observed that the student body, for the most part, was more interested in the college social life and preparing for the high-paying positions they hoped to secure after graduation than demonstrating and protesting.[37] However, there was a small minority of Howard University students who were eager to get involved in the movement. Carmichael quickly joined that group. Carmichael was already a member of CORE, but he also joined The Nonviolent Action Group, (NAG). Some of the people who attended Howard University with Carmichael and became members of NAG were, Cleveland Sellers, Stanley Wise, Courtland Cox, Bill Mahoney, and Ed Brown, H. "Rap" Brown's older brother. This group eventually became members of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.[38]

NAG was organized on Howard's campus, in 1960, after the sit-in movement began. It was one of the major contingents within SNCC. During its first year, NAG waged successful demonstrations at Washington facilities such as lunch counters, restaurants, a movie theater, and an amusement park. NAG was able to desegregate 25 facilities as well as attract the support of over 200 participants. Carmichael was instrumental in getting people to participate in the demonstrations. According to fellow NAG activist, Courtland Cox, "In Stokely's early days at Howard, he showed an instinct

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[37] Sellers, 57.

[38] Sellers, 60; Thelwell, 617-22.

for mobilizing people, he'd say, 'We're going out to demonstrate and afterwards we're going to have a big party,' and they came out too, these guys who were totally apolitical."[39] Dr. Dorsey agrees that, "Carmichael was very popular, a leader, other people listened to him. As I observed the group, he was definitely the leader."[40]

Only two of Howard University's elite group of professors, took interest in the NAG students. Professors, Sterling Brown, and Harold Lewis thought of the students as the next generation of black intellectuals and were interested in the student movement and the ideas of the young activists. Sterling Brown often invited the activists to his house to discuss politics and black life in America.[41] NAG was a "Friends of SNCC" affiliate, which meant that those who were members of NAG were also unofficial members of SNCC. This was the relationship of most student organizations to SNCC. Initially, SNCC had no full-time organizers. However, as unofficial members of SNCC, NAG activists could attend some SNCC meetings and vote in some elections.

Hence, Carmichael's first year of college was heavily marked with civil rights activity. By the time his second semester ended, Carmichael was a seasoned activist, but he wanted to do more. The 1961 Freedom Rides offered him the chance. CORE had tried to test interstate laws against segregation on buses and in terminals by taking buses

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[39] Clayborne Carson, "Stokely Carmichael/Kwame Ture: Courageous Warrior In an On-Going Struggle," *Black Scholar* 27 (Fall 1997): 44.

[40] Dorsey.

[41] Thelwell, 617-22; Charlie Cobb, 34.

of CORE members from Washington D.C. to New Orleans, Louisiana. As they tried to force the integration of each terminal, they were violently beaten and hospitalized by security police. Eventually, they had to end the Rides because no drivers would agree to take them. However, SNCC decided to organize the people and continue the rides. When Stokely Carmichael called his mother and told her that he was going south to participate in the Freedom Rides, she was so upset that she hung up on him.[42] She had no idea that this was only the beginning of Stokely Carmichael's long relationship with SNCC and the Civil Rights Movement.

In summary, Carmichael's early life indicates that he was always a passionate young man with an interest in the rights of black people. It also indicates that he possessed leadership capabilities. Undoubtedly, Carmichael's early exposure to politics, which stemmed from his West Indian heritage, as well as his initial training in political organizing as a student, gave him the fortitude to effectively and positively channel his passion for the rights of black people. His family's stress on education and hard work combined with his innate intelligence undoubtedly gave Carmichael the tenacity and skills to be a great leader. Possibly one of the most important qualities Carmichael exemplified early in life, and carried over to his adult life, was his ability to adapt to change and to know when to anticipate it. As a youth, Carmichael decided to give up criminal activity, which might have led him on a different life path, for the more positive pursuit of academic accomplishment. Similarly, Carmichael turned from the middle-class, white ivy-

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[42] Carson, 44.

league world, which he had been accepted into, to the black-oriented college experience. This flexibility towards change permeated Carmichael's life and led to his most controversial change, from integrationist to militant.

CHAPTER 3

SNCC: Tracing Carmichael's Ideological Change

In 1961, Stokely Carmichael began a relationship with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) that continued for over seven years. Over the course of that relationship, Carmichael experienced an apparent shift in his ideology. The shift was from civil rights integration to Black Power militancy[1]. Thus, SNCC was a very important part of Carmichael's political growth. SNCC also experienced different phases of growth in the 1960s. SNCC's evolution can be traced from its formation years to the Freedom Rides and most climactically to Freedom Summer.

SNCC grew out of the student sit-ins, which occurred throughout the South in the early 1960s. In February of 1960, four black college students in Greensboro, North Carolina, initiated the lunch counter protests that drew attention all over the world. With little preliminary planning, the four North Carolina A&T University students went to the local Woolworth Five and Dime Store to see what would happen if they sat down at the lunch counter. Though they were only asking for a cup of coffee, the four young men understood that they were in defiance of a Jim Crow tradition in the South, which

[1] "Black Power" was associated with black self-determination much like "moral suasion" was associated with nonviolence.

drew a strict line between whites and blacks, restricting the latter to second-class citizenship. Clayborne Carson posits that these students made the choice to "break with the past." He comments that they were acting out of resentment of historical circumstances, under which they and their parents were compelled to live and work. Still, he cautions that the students had no conception of the future significance of their actions. The fact that those who took up the sit-in protests were college students indicates that they were preparing themselves to attain a certain life status. They were preparing to achieve the American dream of career, home, car, entertainment, and travel. Yet, they understood that even with the financial capability, they could not fully enjoy all parts of the American dream because they were black. America had never intended on allowing black people to realize the benefits of being American citizens.

James Forman makes it clear that the American dream included more than the freedom to eat at any restaurant. The students wanted to share in the complete dream, the dream that allows one to pursue happiness unfettered by racism. He explains, "by and large, this feeling that they had a destined date with freedom was not limited to a drive for personal freedom, or even freedom for the Negro in the South. Repeatedly, it was emphasized that the Movement was concerned with the moral implications of racial discrimination for the whole world and the human race."[2] Whether the protests emerged from the students' aspirations to middle-class status as implied by Carson, or were

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[2] Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNNC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1981), 9; James Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 218.

initiated from a true interest in human rights is inconsequential, the rights implied by the Constitution were being denied. Therefore, the students took the initiative to fight.

The Greensboro students were refused service without reprisal so they went back to their campus and recruited more students to accompany them the next day. Thus, began a Movement on different college campuses across the South. During the first two weeks, sit-ins spread to fifteen campuses. By mid-April, the sit-ins had spread to all of the Southern states and included over fifty thousand participants.[3] Although, the Greensboro students initially met with little more resistance than unkind words, the sit-ins that followed involved violent repercussions. One sit-in participant recounted:

> Lighted cigarettes were pushed against the backs of girls sitting at the counter. A white sit-inner, on a stool beside a Negro girl, became a special object of attention by the crowd nearby. Someone kept calling him a "nigger lover." When he didn't respond he was pulled off the stool, thrown to the floor, and kicked.[4]

Even though they encountered violence and over 3,000 students spent time in jail, the victories were impressive. In fact, by the end of 1961, several hundred lunch counters were desegregated in the South.[5] The students demonstrated to the country that they were concerned, courageous, and organized. They saw the slow pace of change in the country and they took the challenge to do something about it.

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[3] Howard Zinn, *SNCC: The New Abolitionists* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 16-17.

[4] Ibid., 20-21.

[5] Ibid., 16.

Ella Baker, veteran activist and executive director of SCLC, was quick to perceive the significance of the sit-ins and their results but she did not want to structure the student Movement. Baker saw the necessity of coordinating their actions so that they might sustain their Movement. She felt that they should form a link and offer encouragement to one another. She convinced the SCLC that a conference should be held for the sit-in leaders to congregate. She received $800.00 from SCLC and the promise of Martin Luther King's presence. As well, she petitioned her alma mater, Shaw University for the use of their facilities for the conference.[6]

The conference took place during the Easter weekend, of 1960, on the Shaw University campus in Raleigh, North Carolina. There was an expected arrival of one hundred student representatives but more than 300 came, representing fifty-six colleges in the South and nineteen schools from the North. The enormous impact of the students' numbers led King and others in SCLC to suggest that the students become a youth-wing of the SCLC. However, Baker had envisioned that the young activists would use the conference as an opportunity to discuss what *they* desired to do next.[7]

Having years of experience with the organization of ministers, Baker was leery of the leader-centered SCLC. She felt that the organization was too dependent on Martin King and, would not be conducive to independent thinking. She hoped that the student

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[6] Carson, 19-20; Forman, 216.

[7] Ransby, *Ella Baker*, 240-243; Forman, 216; Zinn, 33, 34.

activists would form an organization independent of SCLC. Miss Baker described her thoughts on the conference as follows:

> It is important to keep the Movement democratic and to avoid struggles for personal leadership. It was further evident that desire for supportive cooperation from adult leaders and the adult community were also tempered by apprehension that adults might try to capture the student Movement. The students showed willingness to be met on the basis of equality, but were intolerant of anything that smacked of manipulation or domination. This inclination toward group-centered leadership, rather than toward a leader-centered group pattern of organization, was refreshing indeed to those of the older group who bear the scars of battle, the frustrations and the disillusionment that comes when the prophetic leader turns out to have heavy feet of clay.[8]

It was decided at the conference that SNCC would remain independent without affiliation with SCLC. SNCC was to be a temporary committee, which would meet monthly to coordinate student movements across the South. It would serve as a mouthpiece for the Movement by spreading the word in different areas. At the meeting in May, it was decided that SNCC would be called the Temporary Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. A Fisk University graduate student, Marion Barry, became the first Chairman. An office was set up in Atlanta and Jane Stembridge, a white theology student from Virginia, was installed as the office secretary.[9] The most important occurrence at the May meeting, however, was the adoption of a statement of purpose. James Lawson, a leader of the Nashville student Movement, who had impressed SNCC

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[8] Ella Baker, "Bigger than a Hamburger," *Southern Patriot*, May 1960, 4.

[9] Cheryl Lynn Greenberg ed., *A Circle of Trust: Remembering SNCC* (United States: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 5.

students at the Raleigh conference with his speech about nonviolence, wrote the statement:

> We affirm the philosophical or religious ideal of nonviolence as the foundation of our purpose, the pre-supposition of our faith, and the manner of our action. Nonviolence as it grows from Judaic-Christian traditions seeks a social order of justice permeated by love. Integration of human endeavor represents the first step towards such a society . . . .[10]

The doctrine of nonviolence was a carry-over from the direct action strategy of the sit-ins. Nonetheless, SNCC, as a group, struggled with the commitment to nonviolence. In fact, after the sit-ins, nonviolence would be a never-ending controversy in SNCC. There were two factions on the issue. One, faction totally accepted the philosophy of non-violence as a way of life; the other faction, saw nonviolence and direct action as a strategy or tactic to be used to sway public opinion. Looking back on his years in SNCC Carmichael said:

> Most of us in SNCC did not accept non-violence as a principle, King did. We saw it as a tactic. As a principle you have to use it all the time under all conditions. As a tactic, we could use it today if it was working fine. If it wasn't working; tomorrow we could toss hand grenades.[11]

Even during the marches Carmichael makes it clear that only the front lines were truly nonviolent but "the back would be snipers shooting."[12] Yet, others remembered it differently. In *The New Abolitionists,* Howard Zinn indicates that the only violence perpetuated against the violent crowds was done by blacks who were not in SNCC. SNCC activist, Dianne Nash infers that SNCC members "took truth and love very

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[10] Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, The Chairmen's Files, 1960-1969, Reel 1.

[11] Isabel Wilkerson, "Soul Survivor," *Essence,* May 1998, 109.

seriously" adding, "we used non-violence as an expression of love and respect for the opposition."[13] Still, some SNCC members agreed with Carmichael in his assertion that not all SNCC members were accepting of non-violence as a principle. According to SNCC Field Secretary, Charles Sherrod, "non-violence as a way of life was a long way off for most of us." Yet, he adds that it was still "an invincible instrument of war."[14] SNCC staffer, James Forman was also in agreement with Carmichael. He concurred, "many of us believed in non-violence only as a tactic."[15] Emily Stoper, former SNCC activist explains that The Nashville Student Movement, SNCC's most popular faction during the sit-ins, was the only group with a "very deep adherence to the philosophy of nonviolence."[16]

According to Clayborne Carson, the Nashville group included many theology students including John Lewis, James Bevel, and the most influential of the group, James Lawson. Then again, the most adamant tacticians were the Northern NAG students, the group to which Stokely Carmichael belonged. He and his NAG comrades often had major disagreements with the radically religious group in SNCC, which included John Lewis and James Bevel. Sometimes Carmichael and his friends would go so far as to refuse to join the others in prayer. Former SNCC Chairman, John Lewis remembers, ". . . Carmichael . .

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[12] Forman, 376.

[13] Greenberg, 20.

[14] Fred Powledge, *Black Power and White Resistance: Notes on the New Civil War* (Cleveland: World Publishing, 1967), 39.

[15] Forman, 376.

[16] Emily Stoper, *The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee: The Growth of Radicalism in a Civil rights Organization* (New York: Carlson Publishing, 1989), 27.

. [never] had much interest in Gandhi or the principles of nonviolence or even the Bible." Yet he adds, "Carmichael was totally committed to our cause."[17]

Hence, the duality within SNCC seems to have centered on the acceptance of nonviolence as a principle or a tactic. Yet, organizationally, the controversy had little bearing on the group's performance of civil rights work. Thus, the different opinions, which are likely to exist within any large group of individuals from various backgrounds and beliefs, were not yet an issue. For the most part, in 1960, the students who participated in the sit-ins and in SNCC were true believers. They believed that the American society was just and moral and, could be changed by nonviolent protest. Historian Cynthia Griggs Fleming describes them by saying, "these young activists felt like God's chosen people," and as such "they felt obligated to act because they could make a difference."[18]

At SNCC's second conference in October of 1961, the organization became a permanent one. Still, SNCC maintained its loose ties with local organizations as well as older, established ones. The role of SNCC would continue to be that of coordinating the different groups in the Movement until at least two-thirds of its members voted to initiate a project or action. SNCC was very reluctant to determine any of the directives of local community groups, however, when the sit-ins began to decline towards the end of the

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[17] John Lewis, *Walking With the Wind: Memoir of the Movement* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998), 173.

[18] Cynthia Griggs Fleming, *Soon We Will Not Cry: The Liberation of Ruby Doris Smith Robinson* (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998), 54.

year, SNCC representatives began to consider ways of extending the Movement. Within months, SNCC found the perfect opportunity to breathe life back into the declining student Movement with its participation in the Freedom Rides.[19]

Freedom Rides

In 1961, when the organization extended CORE's Freedom Rides in the South, Carmichael was there. The Freedom Rides took place one year after SNCC was formed. CORE originally developed the Freedom Rides to test adherence to the law forbidding segregated facilities in bus terminals.[20] On May 4, 1961, thirteen volunteers, including six whites, attempted to take buses from Washington to New Orleans. SNCC's John Lewis was part of the group. They traveled through Virginia, North Carolina, and Georgia with little resistance from the law enforcement agencies. Nonetheless, upon entering Birmingham, Alabama, the two buses were attacked by an angry white mob. The buses were bombed with tear gas, forcing the riders off and into the hands of the mob. The mob severely beat the riders, sending some to the hospital. Despite this, the next day the Freedom Riders prepared to resume their journey. Unfortunately, the group had to fly to New Orleans because no bus driver was willing to take them.[21] Diane Nash, then SNCC's only full-time employee, heard about the violence and quickly prepared SNCC to take

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[19] Carson, 32.

[20] Zinn, 41; Carson, 33; Forman, 145.

[21] Zinn, 42-44; Carson, 34.

over the Freedom Rides.[22] Initially, the Nashville sector of SNCC performed the rides. As the rides continued, others, including Ruby Doris Smith and Stokely Carmichael joined in. In fact, during the Mississippi Freedom Rides, of May 1961, Carmichael and Smith were arrested and imprisoned for fifty-three days in Mississippi's Parchman Penitentiary. This was Carmichael's first experience being jailed and he suffered much physical and mental abuse. He actually endured cattle prod poking while incarcerated in Parchman.[23] More than three hundred riders were arrested in Jackson, Mississippi. Jackson was the point of greatest resistance to desegregation. The riders chose to fill up Mississippi jails rather than pay the fines. Amidst all of the beatings and jailing, Attorney General Robert Kennedy was forced to send federal marshals to protect riders going from Montgomery to Jackson. Kennedy pleaded for a "cooling-off period." However, the Freedom Rides continued throughout the summer.[24]

The significance of the Freedom Rides was two-fold. First, they led to the Interstate Commerce Commission's issue of regulation prohibiting separate facilities for blacks and whites in bus and train terminals. Second, the Freedom Rides instilled a new sense of purpose in those who had worked together and suffered jail terms together. Moreover, they became aware of their collective ability to evoke change and attract media

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[22] Fleming, 81.

[23] Zinn, 45.

[24] Carson, 36-37.

attention and federal intervention using the "jail, no bail" practice. The students looked to SNCC as their umbrella as they came together to make permanent changes in the South.

Carmichael became more involved in civil rights, so much so that during his second year of college he changed his major from Pre-medicine to philosophy in order to as he termed it "heal people before they get sick."[25] During 1962, there was another change in Carmichael and NAG. According to Carmichael, in 1962, NAG was confused on the issues of nationalism and integration. The group decided to hold a debate at Howard University between Malcolm X and Bayard Rustin. "Malcolm demolished Rustin! Nationalism became firmly implanted in NAG, and Malcolm's politics had a special place in NAG." He further states, "As early as 1962, NAG members were known throughout SNCC as the Nationalists."[26] Conversely, despite Carmichael and NAG's feelings on integration, both remained just as committed as others were to the tactics of the Movement. They endured the abuse and gave up much in the way of comfort to pursue civil rights through nonviolent direct action.

Carmichael continued to spend his summers and vacations organizing in the South until his graduation from Howard University in 1964. He was offered a scholarship to Harvard University to do graduate work, but like so many others in SNCC, he enjoyed civil rights work. They called it "freedom high." Carmichael and his comrades were so

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[25] Jacqueline Johnson, *Stokely Carmichael: The Story of Black Power* (New Jersey: Silver Burdett Press, 1990), 108.

[26] Kwame Ture, "Kwame Ture on Malcolm X," *Pan-African Roots* 3 (June 1993): 10.

committed to their work that they lived on $20.00 a week[27] and faced violence and death to do it.[28] The Civil Rights Movement was a way of life for the students. The fact that Carmichael had done well and finished college was remarkable. Many SNCC workers never returned to their colleges after the first summer of Freedom Rides.[29]

Graduating with a degree in philosophy, Stokely Carmichael became a full-time organizer in SNCC in the summer of 1964. He worked as a Project Director in Greenwood, Mississippi, which was the base for the SNCC office during Freedom Summer.[30] SNCC decided to expand its work from protest to voter registration. According to Movement scholars Carson and McAdam, President Kennedy urged the decision to switch efforts to voter registration because he felt the protests, especially the Freedom Rides, were too dangerous and brought unwanted media attention to the racial problems in the United States.[31] Nevertheless, SNCC, unmoved by the President, felt that voter registration was the next logical step for the Movement. The group had no delusions of avoiding danger. Having experienced the violent reprisals of Mississippi racists during the Freedom Rides, SNCC was prepared for an arduous struggle throughout the South and its transformation.

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[27] Cleveland Sellers, *River of No Return*, 47.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Fleming, 64-65;Levy, 307.

[30] Cobb, "Revolution," 35.

[31] Carson, 38-39; Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency 1930-1970* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 170.

Freedom Summer of 1964

The Civil Rights Movement, by 1964' had reached its peak. Civil rights organizers joined and launched the idea of Freedom Summer, which was carried out as a collective response to racism in the state of Mississippi as well as other southern states. The Freedom Summer experiment brought together several organizations working in the state, including SNCC and others under the umbrella of the Congress of Federated Organizations.(COFO) Among the many projects it initiated was the Freedom Vote of 1963, which precipitated events, in 1964, the establishment of Freedom Schools and the formation of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP).[32]

The idea for the voter registration project grew out of a smaller project, attempted in the fall of 1963. During that time, SNCC worked to register potential black voters in Mississippi. Their effectiveness was stalled by the state's obstinacy to racial equality, lack of federal intervention against the state, and SNCC's inability to bring public attention to the issue.[33] A liberal sympathizer to the Mississippi problem, Allard Lowenstein, offered to furnish SNCC with one-hundred white Northern students to assist with a statewide protest vote to prove that black Mississippians did, indeed, wish to participate in the electoral process.[34] The State explained its large number of unregistered blacks with the

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[32] Doug McAdam, *Freedom Summer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 35-36; Ransby, 308-309.

[33] McAdam, 36.

[34] John Dittmer, *Local People* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 203; Carson, 98.

excuse that blacks in Mississippi had no interest in the voting or the political process for that matter. SNCC and the white organizers blanketed black neighborhoods registering voters for almost two months. Their results affirmed that more than 80,000 black Mississippians wanted to vote.[35]

The Freedom Vote of 1963 was successful for two reasons. First, it allowed black voters to cast their votes at mock polling stations within their own neighborhoods, thus alleviating them of the intimidation of entering state poles. Secondly, the large participation of white volunteers in the protest vote brought significant news coverage and federal protection to the area. Bob Moses, an organizer of the protest vote, saw the implications of the project. He proposed that SNCC attempt an even larger voter registration project with a greater number of white participants the following summer.[36]

As chief organizer of the project, Moses, purposed to register Mississippi blacks to vote, organize the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP), and to organize schools to teach reading and math to Mississippi's poor black children. But more importantly, according to Dr. Akinyele Umoja, attempting to alleviate the level of violence on the local black population, particularly those who supported the Movement, was . . . the principal [reason] for the mobilization of privileged white college students to Mississippi.[37] By descending on Mississippi with a mass of civil rights workers, especially

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[35] McAdam , 37.

[36] Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, Minutes of Executive Committee Meeting, Reel 3.

[37] Akinyele Umoja, "1964: The Beginning of the End of Nonviolence in the Mississippi Freedom

whites, violence ensued, bringing media attention to the violence as well as the issues, thus forcing the federal government to step in to protect voter registration workers.[38]

Controversial from the onset, the Summer Project involved recruitment of over 100 white college students to help register black Mississippians to vote. The decision to invite the white northern college students to organize local people was bitterly debated from its inception, in 1963, to the next three years. Opposition to the white volunteers centered on black staffers beliefs that white students had tendencies to appropriate leadership roles, which would impede the goal of developing efficient indigenous leadership sorely needed among black Mississippians. The Freedom Vote activities were a heavy reminder of those issues.[39] Still, the far-reaching significance of bringing worldwide attention to the Mississippi project loomed high above the dissenting views of some staffers. Moses was successful in persuading SNCC's Executive Committee that the white students would bring federal attention to the state's intimidation of civil rights workers. The committee conceded that the press and the federal government would pay greater attention to the beating of a white Yale student than to the beating of a local black person. In fact, former SNCC member, Lawrence Guyot, remembers, "I supported white involvement in the summer project and the reason I did was because I saw how the FBI followed around white volunteers in the Freedom Vote in 1963." He adds, "We could not

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Movement," *Radical History Review* 85 (Winter 2003): 201-226.

[38] Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, Minutes of Executive Committee Meeting, Auburn Avenue Research Library microfilm, 1964-65),Reel 3; Carson, 96.

[39] Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, Minutes of Executive Committee

move unless we bumped into an FBI agent as long as there were white people involved."[40] Marion Barry argued that SNCC should take the opportunity to use the political ramifications of an election year to persuade the President to act.[41] Thus, at the December 30, 1963 meeting of SNCC's Executive Committee the proposal for the Freedom Summer was passed unanimously.[42]

Carmichael's duties as the SNCC director in Greenwood, Mississippi, were training staff, registering voters, and giving out funds. However, Carmichael and other directors found themselves working on all of the projects undertaken by SNCC that summer. There were three different projects, each with a specific goal, which fed into the overall aim of politically organizing the black community in Mississippi. There was the Freedom School that emphasized teaching political empowerment, voter registration, and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party with its purpose of challenging the racist state Democratic Party that did not represent or include blacks. Still, as organizers attempted to accomplish set goals, they incurred difficulties, which ultimately encumbered all three projects.

Among the various activities of Freedom Summer, the Freedom Schools were initiated to facilitate the overall goal of politically organizing Mississippi. In order to do

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Meeting, Auburn Avenue Research Library microfilm, 1964-65) Reel 3.

[40] Greenberg, 80.

[41] Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, Minutes of Executive Committee Meeting, Reel 3.

[42] Ibid.

so, they had to counter Mississippi's deliberate attempt at maintaining its racial status quo by inadequately educating black children. The state only spent $21.77 to educate each black student, compared to $81.66 for each white student.[43] More opprobrious, during the fall cotton harvest, many black schools were routinely closed so that black students could serve as cheap labor. Yet, most disturbing to SNCC, the black children in Mississippi either were not taught their ancestors historical contributions to America or they were misled about them.[44] SNCC field secretary Charlie Cobb and Staughton Lynd, a history professor from Spelman College, developed a curriculum, which included black history, reading, math and a variety of other courses. The Freedom Schools were also used as a liberation tool. Thus, children learned the philosophy and history of the Movement as well as citizenship rights and leadership.[45] The Freedom Schools were successful in that an expected enrollment of 1,000 was increased to an actual 3,000 to 3,500. In addition, the students started their own newspaper and even performed an original play depicting the history of the African-American struggle.[46] More importantly, the schools accomplished their political goals of empowering the students. Students began to feel that they had a right to complain about the situations in their state. They began to

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[43] McAdam, 83.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Staughton Lynd, *Living Inside Our Hope: A Steadfast Radical's Thoughts On Rebuilding The Movement* (Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, 1997), 5-6.

[46] Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, Research Dept., Auburn Avenue Research Library microfilm, 1964, Reel 120.

write letters to the local newspapers and to learn about directing complaints to the appropriate sources.[47]

Overcrowding and lack of facilities were a few of the problems encountered by the volunteers. Still, according to SNCC's files on the summer, numerous individuals and groups sent books and money to help with the schools. Though facilities continued to be a challenge, many black churches offered their buildings to the schools.[48]

On a larger scale, the issues of racism plagued the Freedom Schools as it did the other projects. The threat of violence and intimidation was an ever-present reality for the schools. Despite this, the community displayed remarkable courage and perseverance. After a bomb destroyed the church that had served as their school, seventy-five McComb, Mississippi students showed up for class the next morning and had classes on the lawn.[49] When the court ruled that Harmony townspeople could not repair an abandoned school building to be used as classrooms for a Freedom School, the community came together and built a school for themselves. The community did not give up. neither did the racists. CORE sent forty boxes of books marked educational materials from Columbia University to the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) for the Freedom Schools. They

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[47] "Freedom Schools Mississippi," *The Student Voice,* August 5, 1964, 2-3.

[48] Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, Appendix A: *The Mississippi Freedom Summer*, Auburn Avenue Research Library microfilm, 1964-65), Reel 67.

[49] "Freedom Schools Mississippi, " *The Student Voice,* August 5, 1964, 2.

received the books back a week later marked, "There ain't no educational materials inside, just niggers."[50]

Another interest of Freedom Summer was the establishment of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. Voter registration and establishment of the MFDP were intertwined goals. The goal of voter registration was to get Mississippi's 380,000 unregistered, but eligible blacks registered and to sign them up for the MFDP.[51] The goal of the MFDP was to build a political party, which would truly represent all of the people of Mississippi as well as challenge the seating of the racist Democratic Party's delegates at the National Convention in Atlantic City at the end of the summer. Yet, emphatically, both projects, voter registration and the MFDP sought the long-term political organization of Mississippi's black communities.[52] The volunteers and organizers worked doggedly through July and August to register voters before the August 24th deadline. Meanwhile, SNCC and the MFDP organized precincts, county, and district conventions to complete the delegate selection process. The volunteers registered 80,000 blacks to the MFDP and those registered voters chose sixty-eight delegates to represent the people of Mississippi in Atlantic City.[53]

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[50] Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, *The Mississippi Freedom Summer* (Atlanta: Auburn Avenue Research Library microfilm, 1964-65), Reel 67.

[51] "Summer Project Readied," *The Student Voice,* June 2, 1964, 2.

[52] Carson, 111.

[53] Ibid, 117; "Over 800 Meet At MFDP Convention," *The Student Voice* 5 No. 20, August 12, 1964.

In retaliation for their tenacity and their mere presence in Mississippi, white and black volunteers were harassed, jailed, beaten, and killed. Although the Southern whites in Mississippi were not particular as to whether they committed violence against blacks or whites, the government appeared to be more concerned about the lives of the white volunteers than that of the blacks. This was evident after the death of three volunteers in Philadelphia, Mississippi, early that summer. The three volunteers were James Chaney, a black CORE worker; Michael Schwerner, a white CORE worker; and Andrew Goodman, one of the white student volunteers.[54] They disappeared on June 21, 1964, after leaving Meridian, Mississippi, to investigate a church burning. They were arrested in Philadelphia, Mississippi for speeding, but released that night at 10:00 p.m. according to a Philadelphia policeman.[55] Within twenty-four hours of their being reported missing, the federal government sent 200 Navy men and at least 150 Federal Bureau of Investigations agents to search for them.[56] SNCC leader, John Lewis commented, "It is a shame that national concern is aroused only after two white boys are missing."[57] After considerable search efforts, the bodies of the three volunteers were found on August 4 in an earthen dam near Philadelphia after a paid informant revealed their hiding place to the F.B.I.[58] Months later, twenty white men were implicated in the murders, including the Sheriff and one of his

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[54] "If We Can Crack Mississippi," SNCC Papers, Research Dept. 1959-1969, Reel 20.

[55] Ibid; "Chairman Requests Federal Marshals, *The Student Voice* 5 No. 15, June 30, 1964, 2.

[56] Carson, 115.

[57] "Chairman Requests Federal Marshalls, " *The Student Voice*, June 30, 1964, 2.

[58] "Three Murdered Workers Found," *The Student Voice* 5 No. 20, August 12, 1964, 1.

deputies. On October 3, Sheriff Lawrence Rainey, his deputy, Cecil Price and several other men were charged with "violating the civil rights" of the three volunteers.[59]

After the deaths of the three volunteers, SNCC engaged in greater caution than previously utilized. They installed two-way radios in all of the staff cars and staff members were advised to travel at night, when they were less visible. Stokely Carmichael was Project Director for the Second Congressional District, the Mississippi Delta. The SNCC office where he worked was under attack almost nightly. He became notorious for some of the evasive techniques SNCC staffers used to get around Mississippi. The evasive tactics utilized included, driving without headlights, using back roads, and driving fast, sometimes 80- and 90-miles-an-hour. It was necessary for Mississippi organizers to get where they were going quickly and to outrun whomever might be chasing them. On the dangerous and life-threatening roads of Mississippi, Carmichael was known as an "A number one master of evasive driving." Organizing in Mississippi for two summers prior to Freedom Summer had given Carmichael some knowledge of the back roads to travel as well as the skill of making a U-turn at 90-miles-an-hour to leave a rifle-toting pickup at a disadvantage.[60]

It is undeniable that SNCC workers were persistently confronted with danger; however, it was the Mississippi locals who bore the brunt of the violence. They suffered economic reprisals and the frightening visits from the Klu Klux Klan nightriders.

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[59] Dittmer, 418; William McCord, *Mississippi The Long, Hot Summer* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company Inc., 1965), 104; Carson, 115.

According to COFO records, 37 churches and 30 homes and businesses were bombed or burned in the three months of the summer.[61] SNCC's newspaper contained whole pages of listings of incidents of harassment and violence perpetrated against both volunteers and local people. For instance:

> Clarksdale, July 25, - A beer bottle was thrown through the front window of the Freedom House.
>
> Batesville, July 26, - A house with SNCC workers Claude Weaver and summer volunteers Kathy Amatnick and Tim Morrison in it was tear gassed.
>
> Greenwood, August. 1 – John Handy was beaten in the Leflore County Jail.
>
> Moss Point, August. 4 – Forty-five local people and civil rights workers were jailed during an outdoor voter registration rally.[62]
>
> Itta Bena, July 18, - Clinton Loggins, 16, local volunteer, was arrested by policemen who said there were no charges but they "just locked him up."[63]

Given the danger and difficulty associated with the voter registration work and the media and federal government attention relegated to incidents involving whites, racial tensions were inevitable. While searching for the bodies of the three workers, there were numerous bodies of other black people found, which obviously had not evoked equivalent inducement for persistent search. SNCC members were incensed by the government's apathy towards the lives of civil rights workers and they resented some of the white

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[60] Joanne Grant, "Stokely Carmichael," *The Black Scholar* 27 (Fall/Winter 1997): 39.

[61] Mary Aiken Rothschild, *A Case of Black and White: Northern Volunteers And The Southern Freedom Summers, 1964-1965* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982), 58.

[62] "Mississippi Harassment," *The Student Voice*, August 12,1964, 2.

volunteers for it. When approached by frightened white volunteers, Carmichael sarcastically assured them that the FBI was not, "going to let anything happen to them. They let the murderers of Negroes off, but already men have been arrested in Itta Bena just for threatening white lives."[64]

Staff resentment of the attention lavished on the summer workers paralleled other complaints registered against the white volunteers. black organizers were frustrated that, as feared, white volunteers gravitated towards the leadership roles in the organization and they fostered old paternalistic relationships with the community. Sociologist Doug McAdam explains that the white volunteers, though they may have tried, could not easily shed their racist perspectives. Though they tried to appear color-blind, they fooled no one. He wrote, "For their part, a good many of the volunteers brought a kind of 'missionary' attitude to the project. It was as if some of the volunteers had come to believe that they had come to save the Mississippi Negro."[65] Traces of their attitudes were outlined in their letters and journals:

> The Coordinator, the only Negro among us, left me with mixed feelings. She is not overly literate and showed failings in organization.
>
> The COFO student leader of our project is unfathomable in his ability to not get things done- completely unorganized. I've taken on an informal position of leadership.

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[63] Ibid., July 29, 1964, 2.

[64] Sally Belfrage, *Freedom Summer* (Charlottesville and London: The University Press of Virginia, 1990), 55.

[65] McAdam, 104.

> Several times I've had to re-do press statements or letters written by one of them.[66]

Paternalism was not entirely practiced by the white volunteers alone. Decades of legalized segregation reinforced patterns between blacks and whites. Historian Charles Payne stated that some older southern blacks could not rid themselves of the "worshipful servility" that they had practiced with whites for so long.[67] Sally Belfrage, a volunteer at the time, remembers that the black family she lived with would not let her wash dishes nor would they sit at the dinner table with her and "I never succeeded in getting Mr. Amos to stop saying "Miss Salli."[68] Additionally, SNCC staffers noticed that older black Mississippians would often refuse to register to vote at their pleading, but would eagerly obey when asked by a white volunteer.[69]

After months of tireless work at voter registration and organization of the MFDP, SNCC and the MFDP headed for Atlantic City. Neither was delusional enough to believe that it would be a simple matter to secure the seats from the Regular delegates. Nevertheless, if the MFDP could gain the support of only eleven out of a 108-member Credentials Committee, the seating dispute would be sent to the convention floor. There,

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[66] Elizabeth Sutherland, ed., *Letters From Mississippi* (New York: McGraw Hill Book Co., 1965), 202.

[67] Charles Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition And The Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1995), 308.

[68] Belfrage, 46.

[69] Ibid.

if only eight states requested it, a vote would be taken on the issue.[70] If they got that far, the MFDP had no doubt that their delegates could be seated. Prior to the August 22 opening date of the convention, the MFDP worked diligently to petition liberal Democrats who might lend their support to the issue. Ella Baker, Reginald Robinson, and Marion Barry mobilized commitments of support from twenty-five Democratic congressmen. Joseph Rauh, a labor lawyer and civil rights sympathizer, counseled the group and helped them through the formal particulars of the political process.[71] On the Credentials Committee, the MFDP had the support of Rauh and Edith Green, a congresswoman from Oregon.

On the first night of the convention, the MFDP presented their case to the Committee. Rauh presented a legal brief, which explained that the regular delegates did not truly represent the Democrats of Mississippi because half of the state population was excluded from the political process, including selection of the delegates.[72] In addition to the brief, verbal testimonials were given about the exclusionary tactics practiced by the state of Mississippi, the most moving one being that of Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer. Mrs. Hamer testified that she was fired, jailed, beaten, and humiliated because she had tried to register. She finished with, "If the Freedom Democratic Party is not seated now, I

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[70] "Democratic Convention Faces Showdown," *The Student Voice* 5 No. 21, August 19, 1964, 4.

[71] McAcam, 119; Carson, 124; Forman, 387.

[72] Forman, 387.

question America."[73] Mrs. Hamer was a local woman who had endured a great deal of oppression at the hands of Mississippi's racists, but never gave up her pursuit of justice. Carmichael said of Mrs. Hamer, "It was so important to project her during the MFDP challenge. Sharecroppers can identify with her. Mrs. Hamer's significance is very different from Dr. King's," implying that Dr. King is respected for his intelligence and articulation whereas Mrs. Hamer is viewed as "a beautiful soul," yet lacking analytically.[74]

Hamer's testimony was widely received by the television audience watching the convention. They sent in numerous telegrams urging their state representatives to support the MFDP.[75] Unfortunately, the challenge never reached the convention floor. In an effort to thwart any impedance to his nomination as the Democratic nominee for President, Lyndon Baines Johnson quickly approved a compromise, which offered two at-large seats to specific delegates and allowed the other delegates to sit as guests.[76] After the compromise was offered, many labor, liberal and civil rights leaders deserted the MFDP because of closer ties to the National Democratic Party and fearing reactions from white southern Democrats.[77]

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[73] Theodore H. White, *The Making Of The President 1964* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 387.

[74] Stokely Carmichael, *Stokely Speaks: Black Power Back To Pan-Africanism, Who Is Qualified* (New York: Random House, 1965,1971), 13-14.

[75] McAdam, 119; Carson, 125.

[76] Carson, 125; Forman, 390; McAdam, 120; Dittmer, 289.

[77] Johnson, 59.

In his autobiography, *The Making of Revolutionaries*, James Forman named Walter Ruether, Senator Wayne Morse, Roy Wilkins, Bayard Rustin, Martin Luther King, Jr., Ralph Abernathy, and Allard Lowenstein as those who tried to convince the MFDP to accept the compromise. Forman believed that most of them were pressured by the political maneuvering of Johnson, who was determined to keep the Mississippi issue out of the convention fearing loss of white support. SNCC read the situation as a betrayal of the MFDP and the poor blacks of Mississippi. The others, such as Bayard Rustin felt that the higher goal of getting Hubert Humphrey elected, as Vice-President would seal the liberal labor fate in the administration. Rustin had always viewed the labor coalition as an important ally for the Civil Rights Movement. Thus, he and King were willing to reverse their positions on the seating issue on the hopes of future gains. Liberal supporters on the Credentials Committee such as Rauh spoke on behalf of the MFDP delegates before the Committee. Still, with the threat of loss of jobs and promotions, several committee members, including Rauh shifted their support from MFDP to the compromise Johnson wanted. Both the civil rights leaders and the liberal supporters tried adamantly to convince the MFDP to accept the committee's offer.[78] They did not. Fannie Lou Hamer explained, "We didn't come all this way for no two seats!"[79]

Thus, in the aftermath of 1964, SNCC matured far beyond its ambitious, yet idealistic beginnings. It aggravated and brought to light each conflict that had been

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[78] Anderson, *Troubles I've Seen*, 277-278; Ransby, 338-339; Young, *An Easy Burden*, 308.

[79] Forman, 393.

brewing within the organization since its start. Whereas some had simply accepted the philosophy of nonviolence, it was now being questioned. Prior to the summer of 1964, the debate among SNCC's organizers as to who was a true believer in nonviolence and who believed in nonviolence as a tactic seems to have been mostly academic as far as the practice of nonviolence was concerned. In fact, Martin Luther King, Jr. could have been called a tactic believer prior to his meeting with Bayard Rustin who impressed upon him the necessity of disarming his bodyguards and removing the gun from his house while professing nonviolence. Moreover, the Movement itself could not be termed nonviolent in absolute terms. In fact, many of the very people Carmichael and SNCC were trying to politicize through nonviolent tactics were not nonviolent. According to historian Akinyele Umoja, who researched armed resistance among indigenous blacks during the Freedom Movement, "in the face of racist violence and terrorism, black Mississippians rose to the occasion to protect their families, neighbors, property, and Movement activists."[80] When the question arose as to whether SNCC should try to persuade the black Mississippians to adhere to nonviolence, Bob Moses declared that though SNCC could not expect local blacks to commit to nonviolence, SNCC workers were required to be unarmed and committed to the principals set by the organization.[81] However, in view of the letdown of

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[80] Akinyele Umoja, "The Beginning of the End of Nonviolence."

[81] Ibid.

Freedom Summer, the debate over nonviolence resurfaced with a more relevant, and serious tone. Also questionable was the organization's commitment to interracialism.

Although there were measurable successes in the summer such as the Freedom Schools and the fact that 80,000 persons were registered, SNCC's major goal of federal intervention did not occur. Intimidation and violence were deterrents used by whites throughout the summer to control black behavior and to keep blacks from engaging in political activities. These deterrents were used thereafter to prevent voter registration. The federal government responded to violence only in the cases where white volunteers were involved and only when there was wide publicity of such incidents. The state continued to disregard the constitutional rights of Mississippi's black citizens. For instance, 17,000 blacks filed applications to vote in Mississippi's courthouses, but state registrars accepted only 1,600.[82] Furthermore, SNCC's files on the Freedom Summer project contains affidavits filed by Mississippi blacks, as late as1965, in which they complained of still being refused the right to vote on trumped up charges (they had not been registered long enough or they had not paid a poll tax)[83] The Voting Rights Act of 1965 outlawed these practices in the United States. Still, without representation in the Democratic Party, voter registration was of little use to blacks and the National Democratic Party proved to be as unconcerned about blacks as the federal government.[84]

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[82] McAdam, 81.

[83] Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, *The Mississippi Freedom Summer* (Atlanta: Auburn Avenue Research Library microfilm, 1964-65), Reel 67.

[84] Ransby, 342.

After the MFDP defeat, some organizers remained in Mississippi and continued to work with the MFDP. Many organizers left in search of new projects. Others were so embittered, they left organizing altogether.[85] Stokely Carmichael was ready to leave. His desire to organize poor black people was immense. On the other hand, his tenacity for integrating white institutions and working with white liberals was replaced with skepticism.[86] Cleveland Sellers, Carmichael's NAG comrade and comport in Lowndes county captured the mood of many when he stated:

> When we look at the summer of 1964 and we examine the fact that the failed challenge to the national Democratic Party left in many of us a level of frustration and torment over the fact that we had presented the most persuasive argument of any group that I know of during that time of the plight of poor folks in Mississippi to enter into the political process. Even with the documentation on the murders, bombings, the car of the three civil rights workers was burned, and the bell from the church that was burned which got Schwerner, Goodman, and Chaney involved in Philadelphia on that particular occasion, we were rejected. Our moral concern and legitimacy and issues were turned down because of practical political considerations. So at that point in an organization like SNCC we are observing all these things that are happening around us. We're very conscious, were very observant . . . And in that seeking direction, we do several things. One is that we know we have a legitimate target area while organizing, and that's in the South. We also know that with the rejection by the Democratic Party of our effort to create Freedom Democratic parties that we had to talk about independent political organizing. So we moved to Alabama.[87]

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[85] Fleming, 141; Greenberg, 157; Ransby, 343.

[86] Cobb, "Revolution," 35.

[87] Greenberg, 156-57.

Hence, Carmichael was prepared to conceive a different course of liberation, exclusive of the pitfalls of the past.

The year 1964 proved to be a pivotal year for Carmichael and SNCC. Carmichael closed Freedom Summer amid a complex mixture of frustrations, which were not entirely confined to the Freedom Summer experience. Actually, Freedom Summer was the climax of issues that had been warring within Carmichael prior to the beginning of the summer. Mississippi officials began challenging Carmichael and other SNCC staffers' notions of nonviolence, moral suasion, and interrracialism long before the Freedom Summer project. Carmichael had spent every summer working in Mississippi since 1962. The work in Mississippi proved to be violent, intimidating, and unproductive. SNCC workers experienced white American racism at its most savage with little intervention from the federal government. Ed Brown, a long-time fellow activist of Carmichael recalled that, "the process of disillusionment began around 1963 with the pervasiveness of violence, and no real response from the government, just investigations where nobody was prosecuted."[88]

Without significant federal intervention, SNCC was unable to convince more than five percent of the black voting age population in Mississippi to attempt registration. After two years of relentless repression, insufficient progress despite their sacrifices, and the government's undaunted complicity, Carmichael and his comrades were bitter, angry, and exhausted. Mississippi brought the idealistic young activists to the realization that

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[88] Ed Brown, interview by author, 1 December 1999, Atlanta, tape recording, Atlanta.

they were not just fighting white racists, but an entire system of social, economic, and political oppression, which thrived with the support of the state and the feigned incognizance of the federal government.[89]

The lost zeal for interracialism was forged earlier in Mississippi. The constant racial attacks endured by the SNCC staff at the hands of whites produced hostility, which it can be assumed some eventually felt towards all whites. The failure of the Kennedy administration to deliver on promises to protect voter registration workers in Mississippi produced similar sentiments of anger and hostility about liberal Democrats.

The two years of exhaustive and despairing work experienced by the SNCC workers was enough to produce bitterness and cynicism concerning interracialism and nonviolence. Yet, it can be surmised that the Freedom Summer project created even greater hostility and resentment by whites toward the SNNC workers. Not only did the experience force SNCC staffers to acknowledge their powerlessness against the racist white Mississippi establishment and their minute importance to the federal government, but it also forced them to reconcile these bitter truths and exploit them. It inferred that SNCC had to depend on white volunteers to induce the government to act in a just manner.

This was the complexity of issues creating bitterness and cynicism in Carmichael going into Freedom Summer. Freedom Summer with its continuation of violent repression, paternalism, liberal treachery, and federal shortcomings made his revelations

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[89] Carson, 139.

conclusive. Nonviolence and interrracialism were already questionable to Stokely Carmichael, but the MFDP defeat sealed the case on moral suasion. Carmichael looked upon Mississippi as a valuable lesson. Based on his experience in the pursuit of acceptance, Carmichael was convinced that independent power was the only viable course of rectitude for black Americans. Lowndes County, Alabama, provided the perfect ground to test his conviction.

Lowndes County

After leaving Mississippi, in 1964, Stokely Carmichael pursued another challenge, the Lowndes County Freedom Organization. By this time, he had become a seasoned activist. The call to Lowndes County enabled him to demonstrate his organizing skills in a project that was important to him. Carmichael's ability to organize Lowndes County gave him the opportunity to stand out as one of SNCC's best.

Lowndes County was a small rural area in Alabama's black belt, and was 90 % black.[90] Yet, by March of 1965, none of its 5,000 eligible black citizens were registered to vote.[91] Most were sharecroppers or tenant farmers who lived in homes with no running water. The median annual income of blacks was $935.00, while the median annual incomes for whites were more than four times higher.[92] Initially, SNCC's goal for

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[90] "Negroes Win ASCS Post, But Irregularities Charged," *The Voice* 6, No.6, Dec. 20, 1965, 1.

[91] "Lowndes County Forms Local Political Group," *The Voice* 6, No.6, Dec. 20, 1965, 2.

[92] Sellers, 151.

Lowndes County was simply to get as many blacks registered as possible and then use Lowndes as an example for other counties in Alabama. Lowndes County was chosen as a perfect county to use as an example because it had one of the worst records for racism and brutality in Alabama. Whites ruled Lowndes County with fear, intimidation, and economic reprisals. Their methods of intimidation ranged from economic reprisals to murder.[93] Thus, if SNCC could organize Lowndes County blacks, other areas would be simple in comparison.

In March of 1965, when Carmichael began his work in Lowndes County, he wanted to do more than get blacks there registered to vote. He wanted to mobilize a political force in Lowndes County where blacks would eventually be elected to public office and gain access and control over positions of power in this predominantly black populated region.

Carmichael's earlier experiences with the Democratic Party in Mississippi and in Atlantic City, New Jersey left him distrustful of white political institutions. He was convinced that seeking acceptance into the Democratic Party was a misuse of the power. The number of blacks in Lowndes County represented a source of potential political power. Willie Ricks captured Carmichael's attitude with the statement:

> We wanted to be totally independent and totally separate. We couldn't function with the Democratic Party, they didn't want to function with us. And, they had denied us. They had bombed us, shot us, lynched us, and killed us for trying to be apart of their party. So, we said, "d_ _ n their party." We formed our own party and we decided that we would use our party to take over Lowndes County and take over the courthouses and

[93] Greenberg, 108.

> those institutions inside of Lowndes County and have real control inside of the County.[94]

Jack Minnis, head of SNCC's research department, discovered that Alabama law allowed for the formation of an independent political party at the county level. Residents only had to hold a nominating convention to elect their candidates and if the candidates received 20% of the county votes, their party would be recognized.[95] Lowndes County had a few militant and self-reliant local black residents who were willing to help SNCC organize the community into an independent party, separate from the existing Democratic Party. One resident remarked about the third party plan, "we decided we would do it, because it didn't make sense for us to join the Democratic Party, when they were the people who had done the killing in the county and had beat our heads."[96]

The new political organization was called the Lowndes County Freedom Organization. Its emblem was a black panther. The Party chose a black panther because the panther does not fight until he is backed into a corner, then he is fierce against his opponents.[97] Somewhat, self-explanatory, the emblem was symbolic of the party's dictum-Black Movement from passivity towards power. Carmichael was headed towards

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[94] Willie Ricks, interview by author, 28 November 1999, Atlanta, tape recording, Beautiful Restaurant, Atlanta, Georgia.

[95] Carson, 165; Forman, 443; "Lowndes County Forms Group," *The Voice*, 2.

[96] Frank Miles, "Lowndes County Freedom Organization Leaders Talk about Their Party," *The Movement*, June 1966, 3.

[97] Henry Hampton and Steve Fayer, *Voices of Freedom* (New York: Blackside, Inc., 1990), 49.

a philosophy of black independence and power and the Lowndes County project was his chance to prove power could prevail where moral suasion had failed.

When the emblem of the party was announced, outsiders accused Carmichael of being racist. Cleveland Sellers remarked, "We weren't racists. We were just convinced that it was time for blacks to begin to work by themselves; to prove, once and for all, that blacks could handle black political affairs without assistance from whites."[98] SNCC activist, Fay Bellamy recalls, "The media called it the Black Panther Party. They never used the name Lowndes County Freedom Organization. I guess it wasn't exciting enough." She further chides, "We asked them, would you call the Democratic Party, the White Rooster Party."[99] Critics also came from those within the Movement such as, John Lewis and even Martin Luther King, Jr. Carmichael explains:

> SCLC and Martin Luther King, Jr. did not believe in what LCFO stood for. It was all African and made no appeals to whites. It called for the destruction of the Democratic Party. These were not new platforms to SCLC and in no way did they diminish my love, respect and admiration for Martin Luther King, Jr. and his organization.[100]

Carmichael worked doggedly to get the community registered to vote. For their efforts, the black people in the community were fired from their jobs, removed from their homes, and hurt or killed. Still, the people persevered. When they were evicted from their homes, they set up tents and when the local whites stepped up their violence, the

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[98] Sellers, 152.

[99] Fay Bellamy, interview by author, 30 November 1999, Atlanta, telephone and tape recording, Atlanta, Georgia.

[100] Johnson, 73.

black community protected itself. According to Willie Ricks, "we went into Lowndes County with weapons. We were defending ourselves because on those plantations people had gotten hurt really bad. For the first time we openly took up guns."[101] Initially, registering the community went very slowly due to the deterrence of voting officials. Nevertheless, after The Voter Registration Act was passed in August of 1965, the blacks in Lowndes came out in droves. The act dismantled unconstitutional restrictions on voting such as the poll tax and literacy test. By Election Day, there were 2000 blacks who were registered to vote.[102] And, the Lowndes County Freedom Organization was on the ballot. The LCFO ran candidates for the positions of sheriff, coroner, tax assessor, tax collector and three seats on the Board of Education. They chose to run for the positions where change was most desired as well as needed. For instance, the role of tax collector and sheriff had previously been sources of harassment to the black community.[103] In the end, the Lowndes County Freedom Organization lost the election, garnering only 46% of the vote. In a sworn statement in March of 1966, Carmichael described how a number of Negro farmers received ballots for communities in which they were not eligible to vote. He further stated that he had accompanied many to the county office to exchange the ballots for the correct ones. And, though he was able to get some of the ballots changed, he revealed that there was a list of voters who were denied correct ballots, one was even

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[101] Ricks.

[102] "Lowndes County Forms Group," *The Voice*, 2.

[103] Greenberg, 108.

chased out of the county office.[104] Yet, they were now organized and more importantly, they were on the ballot and by 1970, they had elected a black sheriff.[105] Fay Bellamy indicated that organizing and empowering the community was most important to SNCC. "They were organized and they still are."[106] Carmichael was encouraged by the experiment in Lowndes County. He said:

> For so long, communities in the Mississippi Delta and the -belt areas have had to rely on inspirational and emotional appeals and on the tactics of protest politics. These were in large part, successful; but now they must put together a sustained organization. The LCFO is now a recognized political party in the county; it must organize and operate as one.[107]

He left Alabama convinced that power was the only certain way to freedom from white oppression.

Carmichael left Lowndes County with a new reputation as an effective organizer and with a new philosophy based on black self-reliance. He had successfully organized a black community around the principles of power and independence and he was confident about the future possibilities of SNCC fully organizing around the same principles. The Lowndes County project proved that black people did not need to integrate white society or institutions in order to better their lives. They simply needed to mobilize their power

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[104] Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, *The Mississippi Freedom Summer* (Atlanta: Auburn Avenue Research Library microfilm, 1964-65,Reel 20.

[105] Sellers, 157.

[106] Bellamy.

[107] Kwame Ture and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 119.

and use it in a manner most beneficial to their community. This simple, yet resounding philosophy held great significance for Carmichael. It was significant in that it pointed Carmichael in a new direction. He was no longer an integrationist. The success of Lowndes County was the final step in his transformation from integration to independence.

CHAPTER 4

Stokely Carmichael on Black Power

Carmichael's experience in SNCC more than anything else influenced his new perspective on blackness. His experiences in organizing, as well as the lessons he learned from his work in Mississippi and Alabama, were steppingstones to his emergence as a more militant activist. His black consciousness perspective, which was later termed "Black Power," was infused with three important lessons learned from his involvement with SNCC.

The first lesson Carmichael learned was that the practice of interracialism did not benefit black people. In fact, he found that often it impaired progress. This lesson was learned in Mississippi where some white organizers unwittingly fostered paralyzing patterns of inferiority in the black community and established themselves in leadership roles wherever possible. Yet, most unforgivable, was the fact that the loyalty and support of white liberals was tenuous. The MFDP's white friends were not steadfast allies once their job security and political futures were threatened.

Carmichael's second lesson reconciled that moral suasion was ineffective. The numerous incidents of violence and murder at the hands of whites were enough to bring into question the benefits of nonviolence and moral appeals. Neither the local nor federal government responded or indicated a duty to protect black citizens who were physically attacked by whites who opposed SNCC's work. However, when the Democratic Party

refused to seat the MFDP delegates after hearing the testimony of Mrs. Hamer, blacks saw moral petition for basic human rights as worthless.

The final lesson of Carmichael's long career in the Civil Rights Movement was the most compelling one. The small, but poignant success of Lowndes County, established that the previous reliance on interracialism and moral appeals was not only fruitless, but also unnecessary. More so, SNCC workers found that self-defense was necessary when dealing with violent oppressors. In addition, organizing the LCFO proved to Carmichael that in order for black people to liberate themselves there was a need for self-reliance and the pursuit and use of their own power.

With his lessons learned and the conclusions drawn, Carmichael set out to change the direction of SNCC and the Civil Rights Movement. Those who knew him in SNCC have described Carmichael as infectious and charismatic. Still, the task of persuading the differing opinions in SNCC to follow a more militant direction was an arduous one. Carmichael hoped that prior experiences with reform tactics had created within his fellow comrades a need for more militant goals as the focal mission for black people's liberation.

Few could deny that the young people in SNCC were veterans in the struggle against racism. The validity of their beliefs was substantiated by their southern organizing experiences. The only problem with their vast, collective experiences was that they did not all agree on what was the valid conclusion of their experiences. In 1966, SNCC emerged from its battlegrounds in a state of confusion regarding the lessons learned about the establishment of civil rights for blacks. Nevertheless, concerning the future direction of SNCC, there were essentially two sides. According to Carmichael,

"The contradictions then in SNCC were boiling clearly to a point of whether or not the Democratic Party was or was not our savior, whether or not we [would] continue to speak to our oppressors to stop oppressing us or whether we [would] speak to the masses of the people [and] organize them . . . against the wrath of the enemy."[1] One group was determined to continue along the lines previously set by SNCC, including nonviolence and liberal inclusion. This group included most of the white members as well as the religious contingent inclusive of John Lewis. Still others, such as the original tacticians including Carmichael, but also some southerners like Ricks, Bellamy, and Ruby Doris Smith saw SNCC facing a new challenge ahead. That new challenge was "Black Power." Tired of the rhetoric of moral suasion and faced with the glaring truth that nonviolence and integration were doing very little for the economic uplift of the community, this group felt compelled to strike a more militant cord in the community. Ivanhoe Donaldson remembers, "it was like a thousand years had passed since 1960. We were reading Fanon not Camus, but it wasn't so much about blackness, and Stokely wasn't the purest black nationalist, anyway. It was about revolution and change and internal frustration within the Movement."[2]

The community was ready for this type of leadership. Carmichael points out that the younger generation watched the protests and read the stories about civil rights marchers being beaten, brutalized, and jailed but they saw no significant outcome from all of the struggles. He commented, "we helped to build their frustration. We had

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[1] Greenberg, *A Circle of Trust*, 170.

[2] Cobb, "Revolution: From Stokely Carmichael to Kwame Ture," 35.

nothing to offer that they could see, except to go out and be beaten again."[3] SNCC and Carmichael had similar reasons for wanting to refocus. They were angry, discontent, and disillusioned.

In 1966, Carmichael campaigned for the position of chairman of SNCC. Titles had never been taken that seriously in SNCC because it was an egalitarian organization, and often reached its decisions based on consensus. Also, it was just assumed by most of the group that John Lewis would be reelected as chairman as he had been for the last three years. Then again, Carmichael was so convinced that the community was ready for a more militant approach to freedom, that he could not risk SNCC following any other agenda. According to John Lewis, Carmichael was unscrupulous in his bid for chairman of SNCC. Instead of relying on SNCC staffers to choose a chairman in an unbiased fashion, Lewis attests that Carmichael campaigned for the position before the actual elections when, "No one in SNCC had ever campaigned for the chairmanship."[4] The elections took place in May of 1966 at a retreat near Nashville, Tennessee. After some debate, the votes were taken and John Lewis was reelected. Nonetheless, according to Lewis, after most of the voters had left, a second vote was called by an ex-SNCC staffer named Worth Long. Long challenged the constitutionality of the first vote. Consequently, once discussions of the vote began, Lewis, rather than the constitution became the debate. According to Willie Ricks, the discussion grew very conflictive and argumentative. He revealed, "Forman, Fay Bellamy, and different people made great criticisms of John and his weaknesses. Then we discussed what kind of leader we

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[3] Stokely Carmichael, Stokely Speaks: Black Power Back to Pan-Africanism, 18.

[4] John Lewis, *Walking with the Wind*, 362.

needed."[5] He finished with, "We decided that we didn't need a nonviolent King acting kind of leader. We needed more of a militant leader."[6] Fay Bellamy asserts that after discussing what SNCC needed in a chairman, it was clear that Lewis was not performing a fair job. She said, "He did not seem to want to be Chairman of SNCC. He was splitting his time between SCLC and SNCC. Often he was not there when we needed him to be." She adds, "a debate pursued and another vote was taken. Stokely Carmichael was elected as SNCC's new Chairman.[7]

The militant wing of SNCC agreed with Carmichael's vision of a new black consciousness among African-Americans. Since he had demonstrated in Lowndes County that blacks could organize and control their affairs to their best advantage, the group believed he could do the same in other areas. By choosing Carmichael as its new Chairman, SNCC made the militant shift from a Civil Rights organization vying for acceptance to an organization seeking something different, Black Power.

In 1966, after using the words "Black Power" in Greenwood, Mississippi, Carmichael would be known as the orchestrater of "Black Power." In virtually every published statement from that point on, he would find it necessary to explain what he meant by "Black Power." Before uttering the words, Carmichael had already formed a definitive position on his philosophy. Yet, until Meredith's March Against Fear in 1966, he had not given a name to his philosophy or provided a meaning of Black Power. The March Against Fear seems to have marked the end of the Civil Rights Movement for

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[5] Willie Ricks, tape-recorded interview by author, 28 November 1999, Atlanta, Georgia.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Faye Bellamy, tape-recorded interview by author, 30 November 1999, Atlanta, Georgia.

Stokely Carmichael. Prior to the march, his philosophy was based on black self-determination. Despite this, he continued to work with whites and use nonviolent tactics. The March Against Fear may have been significant to Carmichael's final break with the Civil Rights Movement due to the tension felt between King's followers and the militant group associated with Carmichael before the march began. The two groups had tenuously agreed to march together though they no longer shared philosophies. As the March Against Fear progressed from Memphis to Jackson, SCLC, white sympathizers, and those SNCC organizers still committed to integration and nonviolence shouted "Freedom now, Freedom now!" while the more militant SNCC members began to shout back "Black Power." In addition, white police officers harassed and tormented SNCC and SCLC throughout the march. Thus, by the time Carmichael yelled 'Black Power,' the crowd was already angry, frustrated, and ready to hear anything besides 'we shall overcome.'[8] The momentum increased over the four days of marching and shouting to the point at which Carmichael stood over the excited and expectant crowd with a microphone and shouted 'Black Power.' Now, armed with a slogan to mobilize the black masses, Stokely Carmichael went on to define his ideology to the many inquirers.

Carmichael's speeches, to the effect, deliver more than a definition of terms; they also allude to the breeding ground of "Black Power," strengthening the argument that his Black Power stance grew out of the struggles experienced in SNCC. In each writing, he referred to issues that particularly soured him on interracialism and moral suasion. In two of his first essays published on Black Power, "What We Want" and "Toward Black Liberation" Carmichael attempted to define the slogan and his new philosophy. Both

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[8] Cobb, 32-33.

essays were published in 1966, three months after the Mississippi rally. An analysis of these essays offers critical insight into the origin of Carmichael's militant philosophy.

In essence, Carmichael grew skeptical of the tactics of nonviolence and moral suasion after witnessing their ineffectiveness in Mississippi. In two of his essays, Carmichael discussed the hypocrisy of nonviolence and moral suasion, tying in the attempts made by SNCC and others in The Civil Rights Movement to use it. In "What We Want" he explained:

> For too many years, black Americans marched and had their heads broken and got shot. They were saying to the country, "Look, you guys are supposed to be nice guys and we are only going to do what we are supposed to do—why do you beat us up, why don't you give us what we ask, why don't you straighten yourself out?" After years of this, we are almost at the same point—because we demonstrated from a position of weakness. We cannot be expected any longer to march and have our heads broken in order to say to whites: Come on, you're nice guys. For you are not nice guys. We have found you out.[9]

In the essay, "Toward Black Liberation," Carmichael again spoke on the problems with moral appeals. Consequently, this time he targeted the Civil Rights Movement's attempt to appeal to white institutions. He declared:

> I think we all have seen the limitations of this approach. We have repeatedly seen that political alliances based on appeals to conscience and decency are chancy things, simply because institutions and political organizations have no consciences outside their own special interests.[10]

Obviously, Carmichael was making reference to the rejection of the MFDP challenge by the Democratic Party, which led to his denouncement of interracialism. In both speeches,

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[9] Stokely Carmichael, *Stokely Speaks, 18.*

[10] Ibid , 38.

Carmichael referred to the problems of interracialism as it occurred in SNCC. For instance, in his speech, "What We Want," he said, "The need for psychological equality is the reason why SNCC today believes that blacks must organize in the black community."[11] He further explained, "In the past, white allies have furthered white supremacy without the whites involved realizing it—or wanting it."[12] Carmichael was clearly speaking of the instances of paternalism, which occurred during Freedom Summer. In addition, Carmichael actually challenged whites to go into their own neighborhoods to organize whites. He stated, "They want to run from Berkeley to tell us what to do in Mississippi; let them look instead at Berkeley. They want to teach me Negro history; let them go to the suburbs and open up Freedom Schools for whites."[13] In "Toward Black Liberation," Carmichael discussed interracialism as it occurred with white liberal allies. He conveyed that liberal allies were not always reliable in that, "the political and social rights of Negroes have been and always will be negotiable and expendable the moment they conflict with the interests of our allies."[14] Thus, Carmichael was making another reference to the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party compromise.

Finally, whereas both essays embody the failures of nonviolent moral appeals and interracial alliances as Carmichael experienced them organizing in the South, black Power was given as the availing answer and with it Lowndes County was given as the example. In both essays, Black Power was explained as the only true means of change in

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[11] Ibid, 27.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid., 28.

[14] Ibid., 38.

the lives of poor black people. Black Power as an ideology—a philosophy--rests on the belief that when black people obtain an independent power base, they can make significant decisions within their communities. In "What We Want," two ways were given as potential routes towards community power. The first occurs in majority-black places like Lowndes County, where "black men have a majority," [and] "they will attempt to use it to exercise control." And, second, "where Negroes lack a majority. Black Power means proper representation and sharing of control." Carmichael further explained, "Black Power means what it has always meant to SNCC: the coming together of black people to elect representatives and to force those representatives to speak to their needs."[15] In "Toward Black Liberation" the goals were discussed in a manner to quell criticisms of Black Power:

> The single aspect of the Black Power program that has encountered most criticism is this concept of independent organization. This is presented as third-partyism, which has never worked, or a withdrawal into Black Nationalism and isolating the Negro community but the reverse. When the Negro community is able to control local offices, and negotiate with other groups from a position of organized strength, the possibility of meaningful political alliances on specific issues will be increased.[16]

Carmichael's essays demonstrate that he viewed Black Power as a logical result of the civil rights struggle and an intelligent response to the conditions affecting black people. He saw Black Power as an actual Movement for African-Americans rather than just a philosophical approach. Ironically, the frustrations that Carmichael and his fellow SNCC staff members encountered in the struggle were synonymous with those of the black

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[15] Ibid., 21.

[16] Ibid., 42.

community, which had also hoped that the methods of nonviolence and interracial alliances would be successful. In his essays, he charged that neither of the methods used by the Civil Rights Movement was successful. Thus, it was time for a change.

Moreover, the slogan, Black Power caught on and became popular to the point of inspiring a Movement partly because Stokely Carmichael was a charismatic speaker. Moreso, after using the controversial terms he was given ample opportunity to speak. Yet, the African-American community, particularly the younger African-American community, probably embraced the slogan and the Black Power Movement because, like Carmichael, they were tired of waiting for the Civil Rights Movement to produce political and economic change. Beyond the excitement created by the slogan for African-Americans and the fear it ignited in white America, a significant number of young African-Americans listened to Carmichael and saw the need for African-Americans to gain and use power to bring about social change.

Carmichael's ideas about Black Power as a program were reflected in the Lowndes County Freedom Organization, which organized itself into a black community, the group united to fight for their interests and against outside authority. These ideas were not new. In fact, as Carmichael was well aware, groups, such as Jewish-Americans and Chinese-Americans practiced self-interest and self-reliance. Conversely, within the Civil Rights Movement, African-Americans had historically fought for inclusion into society through legal and civil rights. They hoped to gain entrance into the American society by reforming it. Carmichael's proposal that African-Americans dispense with notions of gaining entrance into the larger society or reforming it and instead organize themselves into community groups for self-interest, self-definition, and self-control was militant,

sudden, and different from the way the Civil Rights Movement for freedom had been conducted. Thus, the Black Power Movement was militant considering the direction that the Civil Rights Movement was advancing in its ideology, its strategic tactics and its pursuit of restorative social justice and social change. Moreover, Carmichael is a militant because he was able to change the direction of the Civil Rights Movement. He had the courage to speak out against tactics, which were not successful and to challenge the African-American community to try a different method. Carmichael did not completely change the Civil Rights Movement because he was not allowed to act on his ideas. The proliferation of his ideas and his utterance of the Black Power slogan caused such an alarm that the government sought to silence him before he or the Black Power Movement could make an impact on the lives of African-Americans.

By the mid 70's, the Black Power Movement was over and so was SNCC. Carmichael admitted, "SNCC worked for Black Power and Black Power killed SNCC."[17] The Black Power Movement's major opponents could justifiably dismiss the Movement as the mere militant rhetoric they had proclaimed it to be by derailing its' short life and lack of meaningful results. A major critic of Black Power, Bayard Rustin, who had been one of Carmichael's earliest influences, refused to even acknowledge the psychological merits of Black Power. In an appearance at Cornell University during the late sixties, Rustin told students that he agreed with the importance of pride in being black, "but being black is not a program."[18] He joined others in the charge that Black Power

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[17] Anderson, *Troubles I've Seen*, 38.

[18] Ibid., 316.

produced only a "legacy of bitterness and dissension."[19] Although, there are some who argue that Black Power did not stall racial progress, but actually helped it along. Sociologist Herbert H. Haines demonstrated that militants of the Black Power Movement, such as Stokely Carmichael, created a situation in American institutions, which made the moderate agenda of civil rights more palatable to societal decision makers. Thus, the more militant voices enhanced the bargaining position of the mainstream activists[20] Moreover, the Black Power Movement brought issues facing African-Americans to the forefront more than any other activist group had. It enabled black people to see themselves as a legitimate group with relevant concerns that need to be addressed. As blacks saw themselves and accepted themselves, they were able to escape the prison of self-deprecation. Ironically, Martin Luther King, Jr. saw this psychological catharsis as relevant and empowering also. In *Where Do We Go From Here* he intimates that "Black Power was welcome as an effort to overcome the inferior mindset that had been forced on many black Americans." Furthermore, he welcomed the call to "psychological manhood."[21]

While critics may discount the importance of cultivating black pride and self-definition, Black Power brought irrevocable changes in the way African-Americans viewed themselves and the value they place on white acceptance. More importantly, this

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[19] Barbara D. Lyles, "Power: Rhetoric, Rap, or Reality?," *Crisis* 80 (November 1973): 297.

[20] Herbert H. Haines, *Black Radicals and the Civil Rights Mainstream, 1954-1970* (Knoxville, University of Tennessee Press, 1988), 2-4, 184-85.

[21] Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where do we go from here: Chaos or Community?* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), 38.

pride has been passed on to the next generation.[22] As for those critics who sought concrete examples of the relevance of Black Power, the reality is that the Black Power Movement did not solve many of African-America's economic and political problems. Yet, neither did the Civil Rights Movement. On the other hand, the Black Power Movement can boast of some significant gains. For instance, The Black Power Movement is credited with ushering in the development of Black Studies departments and programs on college campuses. Black students organized themselves and actively lobbied for the creation of these programs as well as black student unions. These Black Studies programs have continued to exist on many black and white college campuses. The Black Power Movement was also instrumental in creating programs to meet the needs of the disadvantaged and disenfranchised. Some of those programs were adopted by the federal government and continue to support the community today. One such program is the Free-breakfast program started by the Black Panther Party in the late sixties. This program fed many poor Oakland children nutritious meals that they may not have otherwise gotten before it was adopted nationally by the government.[23]

Though Black Studies and the Free-Breakfast program are significant contributions to African-Americans as well as all Americans, they are only small glimpses of what might have been accomplished if the Black Power Movement had actually been allowed to run its course. However, there was strong opposition to the Black Power Movement, which used many different tactics to squash the Movement and

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[22] Bob Blauner, *Black lives, White lives: Three Decades of Race Relations in America* (Berkely: University of California Press, 1989), 234.

[23] Gwendolyn Evans, "The Panthers' Elaine Brown, Does She Say What She Means, Does She Mean What She Says?," *Ms*, 4 March 1976, 106.

its' leaders. The Counterintelligence Program (COINTELPRO) was the organ of the Federal Bureau of Investigations created to destroy dissenters and organizations judged dangerous to the security of the Nation because of their political views. The methods employed by the organization were physical harassment, murder, infiltration, imprisonment, and defamation.[24] SNCC, The Black Panther Party, and other significant figures in the Black Power Movement, including Stokely Carmichael were targeted by COINTELPRO. Many, including Carmichael had to flee the country to escape false imprisonment.[25] In the shadow of such repression it is difficult to judge the Movement's possibilities fairly. If ideologists, such as Stokely Carmichael were free to pursue their programs rather than being forced to go into hiding and seek refuge from foreign sympathizers for survival, there might have been many gains made through Black Power. The FBI certainly thought the Black Power Movement was a serious threat. Indicative of their goal stated in a March, 1968 memo which was to "prevent the rise of a messiah, who could unify and electrify the militant Black Nationalist Movement," The FBI saw that there could be strength in numbers.[26] In 1969, the government seized Carmichael's passport as he was returning from Cuba; however he was offered asylum in West Africa by Kwame Nkrumah, founder of the All African Peoples Revolutionary Party. Carmichael began to believe that Africans and African-Americans should link to free all African and black people of the Diaspora. Carmichael became a Pan-Africanist and

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[24] Kenneth O' Reilly, *"Racial Matters": The FBI's Secret File on Black America, 1960-1972* (New York: Free Press, 1989), 261-353; Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression: The FBI's Secret War Against The Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement* (Boston: South End, 1988), 37-99.

[25] Assata Shakur, *Assata Shakur: An Autobiography* (Westport, Connecticut.: Lawrence Hill, 1987), 233; Cobb, "Revolution," 37; Sellers, *River of no Return*, 391.

[26] O'Reilly, 261-353.

changed his name to Kwame Ture to honor his mentors Kwame Nkrumah and Guinean President Sekou Ture. He believed that "only a strong Africa will give us the strength to free ourselves."[27] Though, Carmichael never abandoned or digressed from Black Power, he never ceased to change and grow as a militant leader.

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[27] Cobb, 37.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the final analysis, Stokely Carmichael made the transformation from integrationist in the Civil Rights Movement to a Black Power militant. The research indicates that time and experience in the Civil Rights Movement made it evident that full integration into American society could not be attained through moral appeals, nonviolence, or the help of white liberals. However, organizing in Lowndes County, Alabama convinced Carmichael that African-Americans could gain power by organizing themselves into independent political groups and using their combined power for self-interest. The experiences and lessons of the Civil Rights Movement were compelling enough to evoke a change in Carmichael's views about the goals and tactics of the Civil Rights Movement which were fraught with years of struggle, frustration, and brutality. If experience is truly the best teacher, Carmichael and his comrades received a scholarly education in what it means to struggle against an unyielding institution such as racism. Thus, when Carmichael explained why he believed Black Power was the only possible means of liberation for African-Americans in interviews, press conferences, and his speeches, he consistently refers to his experiences in SNCC. His discussions included his disillusionment with the principles of nonviolence, soured relationships with white liberals, and the observations drawn from the Lowndes County experiences.

When Stokely Carmichael became an organizer in SNCC, he and his comrades believed that the United State's system of oppression of African-Americans could be reversed through hard work and dedications along with the methods of moral appeals and Blacks and whites working together. For years, SNCC continued to believe in their dream of the beloved community and used the tactic put forth by the Civil Rights Movement. However, their faith in the dream began to fade when SNCC, along with white organizers, were faced with the Mississippi's white racists during Freedom Summer. The Civil Rights activists learned that racism was a way of life for many southern whites that they would rather kill for the continuation of their lifestyle of racism rather than relinquish their tradition of political, economic, and psychological control of African-Americans. After months of doggedly trying to register black voters, teach black children, and organize the black community into a legitimate political party, SNCC was made aware that their tactics were ineffective and their moral appeals were denied. Under Mississippi's firmly entrenched system of separation and racism, the beloved dream was desecrated.

Furthermore, SNCC watched powerlessly as their comrades and the people they were supposed to be helping were murdered, beaten, and humiliated. Amid the frustrations of the fight against racists, SNNC was also faced with the blaring reality that the beloved community within their ranks was not as harmonious as they had hoped. Organizers struggled against the pacifying attitudes of white organizers who were trying to help but were themselves victims of a long history of racism in America. Finally, the

betrayal of White liberal allies at the Atlantic City Democratic convention completed the destruction of SNCC's young, naïve, and ambitious ideas about changing the system.

By the end of the summer the young enthusiasts had aged well beyond their years. As they made their way from Mississippi, they searched for some meaning to what they had experienced. Stokely Carmichael began working on a project that would take the students and the Movement towards the logical next step in the ultimate quest for liberation. Lowndes County allowed Carmichael to test and observe what would happen if black people did not cooperate with whites but formed their own organization and elected their own people and made decisions about and for themselves. What Carmichael learned changed the way he felt about civil rights, moral appeals, and integration forever. With the success of the Lowndes County project, he knew it was time for a change.

By March of 1966, Carmichael was ready for a change, SNCC was ready for a change, and despite what the old guard of the Civil Rights Movement thought, many in the African-American community were ready for a change. When Carmichael stood in front of the Mississippi protesters on that hot evening in 1966, he was sure that it was time for Black Power. He explained his reasons to the audience when he said, "We been saying 'Freedom' for six years and we ain't got nothin.' What we gonna start saying now is Black Power!"[1]

Recommendations

Stokely Carmichael was a complex individual with a rich history of activism. In fact, he dedicated his entire life to the pursuit of true freedom for Africans and African-

[1] Cobb, *Revolution*, 32.

Americans. He grew to understand that the African-Americans could not be free until Africa was free. This research has mainly focused on Carmichael's manifestation into the Black Power militant from that of a Civil Rights integrationist. Yet, there are many other facets of Carmichael's life, which warrant research. Such research might center on Carmichael's strained relationship with his fellow comrades in SNCC after he gained notoriety as a political figure. The question as to whether or not an activist can remain true to his focus once he becomes an icon might be examined. There is also much relevance to the persistent controversy between white liberals and SNCC over the decision to oust their white comrades. Finally, there is limited research about Carmichael as a Pan-Africanist. As one of the great protagonists of the Civil Rights Movement, Carmichael's latter activities are extremely relevant to his legacy. Thus, this research lends only a small portion to the vast amount that needs to be understood about Stokely Carmichael and his contribution to the African and African-American struggle for civil rights and Black power. Researchers must identify the keen perceptiveness of this man as well as his unrelenting dedication and love for black people everywhere.

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